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BLANCO'S BOYS ARE READY

Four Nation Tournament to test our Olympic character

By John Economos

RAUL BLANCO, Australia's Olympic team coach already is excited about the coming 'Four Nation Tournament' to be played over three double headers at the remodelled Hindmarsh Stadium in Adelaide, starting this Sunday night.



Raul Blanco: Excited

Australia over six days will do combat with the current Olympic champions Nigeria, Egypt and the tough South Koreans in the first real serious warm-up step towards this year's Sydney Olympics.

"It's a most unique opportunity to test ourselves against the current Olympic Champions, Nigeria," Blanco stated last night.

"Nigeria are regarded as 'the Brazilians of Africa'.

"They beat Brazil 4-3 in the semi's at the Atlanta Games in the U.S. after Brazil had led 3-1.

"Nigeria went on to win the Gold Medal by defeating Argentina 3-2 in the Olympic Final.

"Now after one year's absence from Australian soil, the fans will have the golden opportunity to see their Australian Olympic team again, and against real quality and very valuable opposition.

"I saw South Korea play China in a 1-1 draw in Shanghai recently where the game was played in front of a crowd of over 70,000.

"South Korea impressed me

very much as they were very fast and very skilful.

"At the end of this Tournament, we (the Australian team) will know a lot more about ourselves. I believe this Tournament will create great excitement at Hindmarsh Stadium.

"But our Olympic team greatly needs the response of a big crowd from the Adelaide people this Sunday night," stressed Blanco.

It's envisaged that Blanco has blue-printed yet another 'Four Nation Tournament' to be staged also in Australia sometime in June against the three strongest sparring nations he can get to come here.

The Olympic coach has announced his squad of 20 (see Page 7) which includes no less than 14 of Australia's Euro-based players.

Special Invitation

The Olympic coach made an intelligent and humane, but also a very professional decision, when he insisted that one of Australia's outstandingly talented defenders, Simon Colosimo, must be added by special invita-

tion to the 20 man named squad to go into camp.

Colosimo is still recovering from having a full surgical reconstruction to his left knee which was so cowardly shattered by a malicious high and late tackle, executed by striker Andy Cole when Australia played the great Manchester United at Sydney's new Olympic Stadium at Homebush last year.

"I have invited Simon to come into our training camp in Adelaide, even though of course he won't be playing. Simon will train, eat and sleep with us, as he is part of our 'Olympic family'.

"In his hour of need, Australia will not abandon him whilst he is in his recovery-mode," Blanco wisely explained.

Olympic Star Chased

Talented stopper or sweeper Hayden Foxe, already under contract with Eddie Thomson's Japanese side Sanfrece Hiroshima, is currently being pursued by England Premier League outfit Southampton.

The Saints were highly



Hayden Foxe: Being chased by Premier League club Southampton

impressed, and have not forgotten the 22-year-old Foxe's performance when the Australian Olympic team earlier last year played, and thrashed, Southampton 1-4 in a friendly hit out in England.

Blanco's evaluation of Foxe was: "He's a marvellous player and knows his business very well. He will have a very good future as he has the skills, drive as well as a correct attitude."

With nine months left before

the 2000 Olympics blast off, Sydney United's tough as teak central defender Eddy Bosnar is making his first appearance in the Olympic squad.

"Eddy this season looks a lot more confident and his general play has impressed me," commented Blanco.

A surprise omission from Blanco's squad is Marconi's strapping defender cum midfielder Buddy Farah.

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TELEPHONE
 (editorial and general enquiries)
 Tel: (02) 9562 0559
 or
 Tel: (02) 9562 0565

(advertising)
 Tel: (02) 9744 6984
 or
 Tel: (02) 9562 0559

E-MAIL
 (editorial, advertising and general
 enquiries)
 soccerweekly@hotmail.com

FACSIMILE
 (editorial, advertising and general
 enquiries)
 (02) 9550 9332 or (02) 9564 1224

MAILING ADDRESS
 P.O. 155, Marrickville NSW 2204

SUBSCRIPTIONS
 Sylvia Marinos
 Phone: (02) 9562 0575
 Australia: \$130 Overseas: \$180

EDITOR
 Vince Battiato

CHIEF WRITER
 John Economos

STAFF WRITER
 Daniel Giorlando

LAYOUT/SETTING
 Mary Quartly, Alamita Vea

CORRESPONDENTS
 Bert van Bedaf (Melbourne editor),
 Allan Crisp (Adelaide)
 Glenn Davis (Brisbane),
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 Nick Phillips

DISTRIBUTION

NSW/ACT:
 FLP Pty Ltd, 5-13 Garners Ave,
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 Tel: (02) 9562-0500

VICTORIA:
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 Collingwood, 3066.
 Tel: (03) 9486-9522
 Fax: (03) 9486-9858

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 Campbell St, Bowen Hills Qld. 4006
 Tel: (07) 3252-6011

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 issue date.

SOUTH MELBOURNE V WOLLONGONG

By Bert van Bedaf

South Melbourne1
Curcija (pen) 86
Wollongong Wolves1
Young (pen) 36

Venue: Bob Jane stadium.
Crowd: 4369.
Referee: David Dwight.
Cautions: Petrovski (WW) 10, Cervinski (WW) 52,
 Clarkson (SM) 71, Ceccoli (WW) 73, Huxley (WW)
 81.
Teams: South Melbourne: Jones, Iosifidis,
 DeAmicis, Orlic, Blstis, Clarkson, Panopoulos,
 Trimboli, Curcija, Anastasiadis (Coveny 35),
 Magnacca (Goutzioulis 63).
Wollongong Wolves: Pogliacomi, Ceccoli,
 Stanton, Cervinski, Hordley, Reid, Surjan
 (Spencer 76), Young (Masi 67), Harlock, Petrovski
 (Souris 83), Huxley.
P.O.Y. Points:
 3 - Cervinski
 2 - Clarkson
 1 - Horsley

South Melbourne managed a late 1-1 draw with
 Wollongong Wolves last Thursday night at Bob
 Jane stadium, after the home side started a third
 successive loss in the face until it scraped home with
 four minutes left.

Both goals came from dubious penalties, in the 35th
 and 86th minutes in what was a scrappy match with tight
 defences playing dominant roles. Also, the best player on
 each side was punished for dubious transgressions, result-
 ing in the two penalties.

David Clarkson, working hard in midfield as well as

helping out in defence, appeared to handle the ball with
 his upper arm inside the area, following a harmless cross
 by Paul Reid. Referee David Dwight pointed to the spot
 on advice of linesman Rick Arturi.

Stuart Young stepped up for the Wolves and hit the net
 past Chris Jones, who had guessed the right corner but
 could not block the shot.

At the other end 50 minutes later, outstanding defender
 David Cervinski also appeared to handle the ball, in a goal
 mouth scramble. Michael Curcija coolly slotted home his
 spot-kick to level the score and give the defending cham-
 pion a much-needed point.

Both coaches were happy to share the spoils.

"We didn't do ourselves any favours by conceding a
 third penalty in a row, but I thought in the last 20 minutes
 we showed shades of our old self. It wasn't a huge spec-
 tacle, but things were pretty tight," South coach Ange
 Postecoglou said.

"I'm happy with the draw, considering we lost two
 games in a row, a draw is better than what we've had
 before," he said.

South adopted a 4-3-3 formation, possibly with Brazil
 in mind but also because of the two-match suspension of
 explosive, right wingback Goran Lozanovski, who was
 red-carded against Carlton last week.

Captain Paul Trimboli made a creditable return after a
 seven-week absence, because of calf and groin injuries,
 and played out the full match.

"We defended well today and I was happy with the way
 it (formation) worked. Trimboli got 90 minutes under his
 belt and after next Tuesday's match (away to Sydney
 United) he will be in good condition (for the Brazil ven-
 ture)," Postecoglou said.

"I thought it was a poor match," Wolves coach Nick
 Theodorakopoulos observed.

"As a coach you can't be entirely satisfied conceding a
 late goal, but the way South Melbourne played in the last

30 minutes was the way we expected them to play. We
 nullified them for two-thirds of the match.

"We've got to give credit to the defensive aspects of
 both sides, but I'm happy with the result. Very much so.
 We can have a relaxed Christmas, being clear third (on the
 NSL ladder)," he said.

South Melbourne took the early initiative, creating
 opportunities for Curcija and John Anastasiadis. The
 Wolves struggled to get into the attacking zone, until the
 35th minute when they went ahead from the penalty spot.

Wollongong nearly got its second goal in the 48th
 minute, but Antony Surjan aimed a free header well over
 the bar from a Paul Reid cross.

Vaughan Coveny should have equalised from a clear
 chance in the 65th minute, but he headed against the post
 from a Curcija cross.

South piled on the pressure in the last 15 minutes, but
 was denied either by a tight Wolves defence or several
 good saves by Wolves 'keeper Leslie Pogliacomi.

When the equaliser finally levelled the score, a draw
 looked like a fair result for both teams. But it was perhaps
 more satisfying for the visiting Wolves than for the
 defending champion, who is struggling to find form.

A good performance in their next match will not only
 enable South to move back into finals contention, but also
 to give a good account of itself against Manchester United
 and Vasco De Gama next month.

Postecoglou was unfazed by the anxieties gripping
 players and officials.

"We're going through a patch at the moment, and we're
 low in confidence.

"But the players ran their socks off tonight and that's
 only what a coach can ask for.

"There's still 22 (NSL) games to go, so there's enough
 opportunity for us to make the finals. I'll be very sur-
 prised, if we would not be in the finals, or embarrass any-
 one (in Brazil)," South's most successful coach said.

	Adelaide Force	Auckland Kingz	Brisbane	Canberra	Carlton	Gippsland	Marconi	Melbourne K	Newcastle	Northern Spirit	Parramatta	Perth Glory	Sth Melbourne	Sydney Olympic	Sydney United	Wollongong
Adelaide Force	X	2-3 13	20	15	0-0	32	19	34	18 26	30	2-1	22	1-1	28	24	1-2
Auckland Kingz	27 31	X	33	14	0-3	1-1	29	3-3	22	26	16	18	1-0	24	20	3-3 24
Brisbane Strikers	2-1	19	X	21	1-1	0-1 34	17	15	28	2-2 32	3-1	24	5-1	30	26	13
Canberra Cosmos	3-0	32	0-1	X	24 28	19	34	18	1-2	13	22	1-1	26	0-1 1-3	7	30
Carlton	23	15	25	20 5-1	X	1-1	21	2-1	13	17	1-3	27	30 32	19	3-1	34
Gippsland Falcons	14	28	16 29	33	20	X	0-2	31	1-0	2-0	18 24	0-1	22	0-1	1-1	26
Marconi Stallions	33	0-3	18	16	0-4	30	X	14	24	1-0 28	15	20 31	2-0	26	22	1-0
Melbourne Knights	16	30	0-1	17	22	13	32	X	3-0	0-1	20	0-3 26	24	2-1	1-0 33	28
Newcastle Breakers	1-1 17	1-1	2-1	27	31	23	2-3	25	X	21	29	3-2	16 33	15	14	2-2
Northern Spirit	0-3	3-2	14 22	31	18	27	25 1-1	29	0-2	X	33	16	20	0-1	15	24
Parramatta Power	21	34	23	2-3	26	1-1 17	1-1	2-1	0-1	19	X	3-1	28	13	1-1 30	32
Perth Glory	0-0	17	1-2	23	4-2	15	3-3 13	6-1 21	30	34	25	X	3-1	32	28	19
South Melbourne	25	21	27	2-2	1-2 14	3-0	23	3-0	19 34	2-0	29	4-2	X	17	31	1-1
Sydney Olympic	2-1	1-2	2-0	20 29	33	25	2-1	27	2-2	23	31	14	18	X	34	1-1 21
Sydney United	1-0	2-1	0-0	25	29	21	1-2	19 23	32	0-2	1-2 27	0-1	13	16	X	18
Wollongong Wolves	29	23 25	31	3-0	16	2-0	27	1-2	20	3-0	14	33	2-1	0-4 22	17	X

Numbers indicate which round the match will be played in. Home teams listed vertically.

MARCONI TO CHARGE THE KNIGHTS

By John Economos

MARCONI travelled to Perth for tonight's (Tuesday) away clash against the Glory, but coach Eddie Krncevic is simultaneously most concerned about Sunday's battle at the Marconi Stadium against the struggling, but defiant Melbourne Knights.

The Glory tonight will be out to jealously preserve their remarkable record of never having lost to the Sydney side in seven consecutive meetings.

Ironically the Glory has never been able to beat Marconi at home in three encounters, yet has won all four games away to Marconi.

Marconi's stopper, Dominic Longo, who will miss tonight's match against the Glory through suspension, will be cleared and available for selection for Sunday's clash against the Knights.

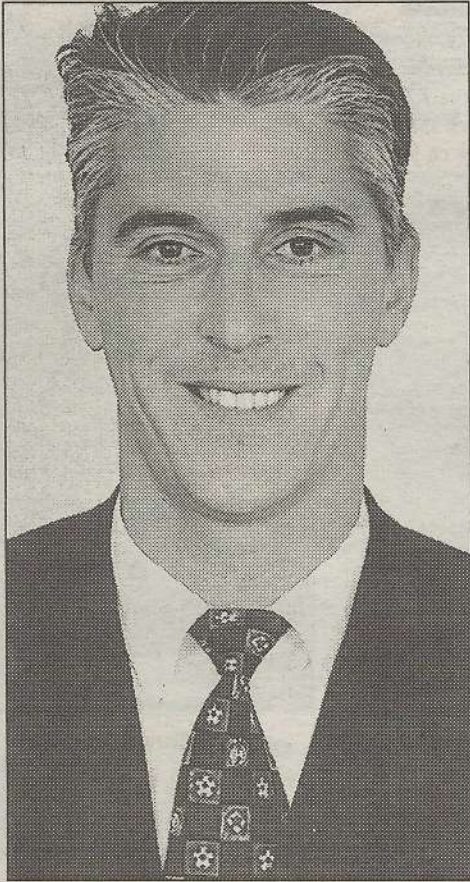
Longo's return on Sunday will give Krncevic an extra option for his lineup.

It was anticipated that robust midfielder Darren McDonald could come into the side for tonight's match against the Glory.

"Look, the Knights are going to give us a hard fight, don't worry about that," Krncevic said last night.

"Their new coach Vlado Vanis has instilled much tougher and stricter discipline in them.

"All I would like is to get all the three League points on Sunday from this match, but it is not going to be an easy task. Far from it.



Eddie Krncevic: Prepared for battle.

"I've changed things around a bit and I believe that we still have not hit our peak as yet.

"But not everything has gone smoothly for us so far," Krncevic stressed.

"Like all teams, we've had our fair share of long injuries, especially to our twin stoppers Mark Babic and Dominic Longo and our other defender Pan Kuen Kim.

"That's part and parcel I suppose of the game.

"However this season, many dubious decisions have gone against us.

"As a club we have suffered from the many inconsistencies we've been subjected to from various referees.

"Many have proved most costly."

Giant striker Francis Awaritefe will miss tonight's match against the Glory and is expected to be out of action for another four weeks, at least.

Late last week Awaritefe entered hospital for an arthroscope on his problematical knee that ultimately forced the towering marksman to miss most of this season.

Melbourne Knights who tonight clash with the Gippsland Falcons, last week had a 3-3 draw against the Auckland Kingz in New Zealand.

In fact the Knights were leading the Kingz with just four minutes to go prior to an equaliser scored by second-half substitute, Jonathon Perry.

The Knights from their 12 outings have lost seven and drawn one.



Buddy Farah: Marconi's marker.

MARCONI VS MELBOURNE KNIGHTS

SUNDAY JANUARY 2



Michael Turnbull



Christian Care



Mike Smith

KICK-OFF 6PM

(Gates Open 5pm)

Youth League v Olympic Academy

8.15pm



Kris Trajanovski



Brendan Renaud

Match Day Sponsors

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Sean Babic

Marconi Stallions are proudly sponsored by **BRESCIA FURNITURE**

The Good Oil ... The Good Oil ...

Ms CLARE BARWICK, a 35-year-old mother from Worthing in West Sussex, England, and now again already three months pregnant, recently on a British radio quiz show won no less than \$2.5 million. No products, just solid cash at that.

Straight after her sensational and monumental cash win, Ms Barwick confessed to the media she had no idea on what she would be spending all her recent winnings on. But she did say that she would first and foremost be buying her 17-month-old son Alfie, a Season Ticket at Upton Park to watch West Ham. What a mum.

MARCONI next month will play a 'Challenge Match' against visiting Macedonian side 'POBEDA PRILEP MACEDONIA'.



Brad Maloney:
Marconi's captain.

This special exhibition match will be played on 12th January at the Marconi Stadium.

Tickets go on sale at Club Marconi (Tel: 9823 2222) from 2nd January.

PARRAMATTA POWER's giant central marker Joe Vrkic was not a happy boy, despite his team having won its away match recently against Sydney United.



Joe Vrkic: Power's giant stopper left without a car.

Parramatta Power officials had organised that the Power players go by bus to the Sydney United Sports Centre.

But after the match Joe found his car had been

stolen whilst the match was being played.

SYDNEY OLYMPIC last week appointed their Marketing manager, Mr Clinton Marks as Acting Manager of the club following the sudden resignation of Frank Martin.

Mr Marks came to Olympic from South Sydney Rugby League Club where he held the position of Marketing Services Manager.

He now steps into the senior position at Olympic at a crucial and important time for the Club.

Rumours over the past week have tagged Olympic, (despite their lofty position on the League ladder this season), as possibly being one of the four clubs to be scuttled from the NSL at the end of this season.

MI L A N **BLAGOJEVIC** and **DOMINIC LONGO** will miss tonight's matches due to suspensions.

Blagojevic will be out for Parramatta Power's clash with Sydney Olympic at the Parramatta Stadium, whilst Longo will miss Marconi's away battle against the high flying Perth Glory.



Mike Smith: Marconi's steely marker.

Power's coach David Mitchell may be forced to gamble and select Australia's Under 17s captain Mark Byrnes to fill the role of sweeper.

Eddie Krncevic, Marconi's maestro, is almost certain to slot Darren McDonald into a marking role with Chad Gibson to free the durable Mike Smith to take over as sweeper.

Marconi's coach has another option, and that is to pull back Buddy Farah into the sweeper's spot, leave the Smith and Gibson combination

undisturbed and bring in McDonald into the midfield.

SYDNEY UNITED tonight clashes with current League champions South Melbourne at the Sydney United Sports Centre at 6pm.

This battle is being billed as the '1999 Grand Final Replay' which Velimir Kupresak's team lost in Melbourne.



Velimir Kupresak: Sydney United's mercurial captain.



By John Economos

points from their last 13 games in which they have run out winners on just four occasions.

.....

PERTH GLORY acknowledged the services of some very special people who worked over the holiday period instead of being home with their families.

Glory's goalkeeper Jason Petkovic and striker Bobby Despotovski last Tuesday handed out 100 complimentary tickets to the St John's Ambulance, Fire and Emergency Service plus the Voluntary Marine Rescue Service for match against Adelaide City.



Bobby Despotovski: Glory's intelligent striker.

THE PARRAMATTA POWER has chosen to shift its NSL home games to Saturday nights for their first two matches in the New Year.

The Power will thus play the Gippsland Falcons on Saturday 22nd January

instead of Friday 21st at 7.30pm.

On Saturday the 29th of January, the Power will clash against the Northern Spirit, also with kick off set down for 7.30pm.

wearing one of his startling coloured and favourite jackets.

The jacket was a glaringly bright emerald green.

The Soccer official jestingly remarked to 'Good



Andrew Crews: The Power's most consistent goalkeeper.

The corresponding Youth League games will also be played on the same respective Saturday nights.

EDDIE KRNCVIC, Marconi's suave coach, last week thought he must have killed a Chinaman, as two of his players went under the knife.

Gangling and powerhouse striker



Francis Awaritefe: Out of action for at least four weeks.

Francis Awaritefe underwent surgery for a 'clean-up' on his knee whilst 'Junior', Marconi's 17-year-old Fijian international attacking midfielder, was also admitted into hospital last week for exploratory surgery on his knee.

Marconi without their big, 35-year-old galloping Awaritefe upfront, are just not as potent.

SPEAKING of Eddie Krncevic, Marconi's gentleman-coach and very well-known for his taste of exotic colours and fashion styles, was recently spotted by a Marconi Soccer official,

JOSIP SKOKO, Australian international midfielder currently in the first division in Croatia with top side Hajduk Split, could soon part company with his club of four years.

The Geelong-born midfielder who captains Split, is rumoured to be moving in an \$8 million deal to join Austria Vienna.

Skoko has the same manager as Mark Viduka who is looking after his affairs.

MARCONI last week zipped in and signed up 17-year-old A.I.S. graduate Kevo Guleserian.

Head coach Eddie Krncevic believes the talented teenager has a wonderful future waiting for him in the NSL.

"He's got lovely touches and listens very well," Krncevic told 'Good Oil'.

PARRAMATTA POWER has switched its match against Adelaide City from Friday 11th February to 12th February.

Kick off will still be at the same time slot of 7.30pm.

The reason for the switch is that the Parramatta Stadium will be unavailable on the Friday night for Soccer as it has been pre-booked for the Parramatta Eels vs the Brisbane Broncos Rugby League match.

"Good Oil" would like to take this opportunity to wish its readers a very Safe, Healthy and Happy New Year.

For the Year 2000, please drive safely.



Josip Skoko: Soon to leave Croatia and head for Austria.

THE POWER TAKES ON SYDNEY OLYMPIC

By John Economos

PARRAMATTA POWER's coach David Mitchell has already tipped that Sydney Olympic who his team will clash with tonight (Tuesday 28th), at the Parramatta Stadium in a local derby, will win the minor League championship.

Mitchell stated last night to ABSW: "Look, they already are sitting at the top of the League and they have a very strong squad."

"They've added Marcus Phillips during the off season and with Scotty Thomas, these two have injected much steel into Olympic's midfield."

Mitchell went on to add: "They have a strong defence as well and in Pablo Cardozo they have a wonderful striker who can turn the game around. It's no surprise to me that they are leading the League."

"Olympic is riding high at the moment and things are happening for them."

"They are playing with



David Mitchell: Power's coach tips Olympic to win the League.

great confidence," Mitchell analysed.

The Power will be without their technical sweeper Milan Blagojevic, out serving a suspension after being sent off six minutes before halftime last week against Sydney United.

Also missing in action will be the Power's mobile striker Joel Griffiths who is out with a shoulder injury.

In a hard battle, the Parramatta Power defeated Sydney United last week.

Olympic also had a win when they overcame the Brisbane Strikers to move to the top of the League ladder.

But Olympic will also be missing a key player.

Olympic's ball-playing playmaker, Gabriel Mendez is out serving a suspension.

The Power are looking to consolidate on last week's performance, and are razor keen for another win.

The Power players will be holding a signing session after the match for all fans. They will be set up outside the dressing rooms on the Western side of the Stadium directly after the game.

Everyone will be

welcomed to come along and meet the players and have their Power gear autographed.

Lucky Trip

At half time of the main game, the winner of the trip to New Zealand to watch the Power play The Kingz FC will be drawn.

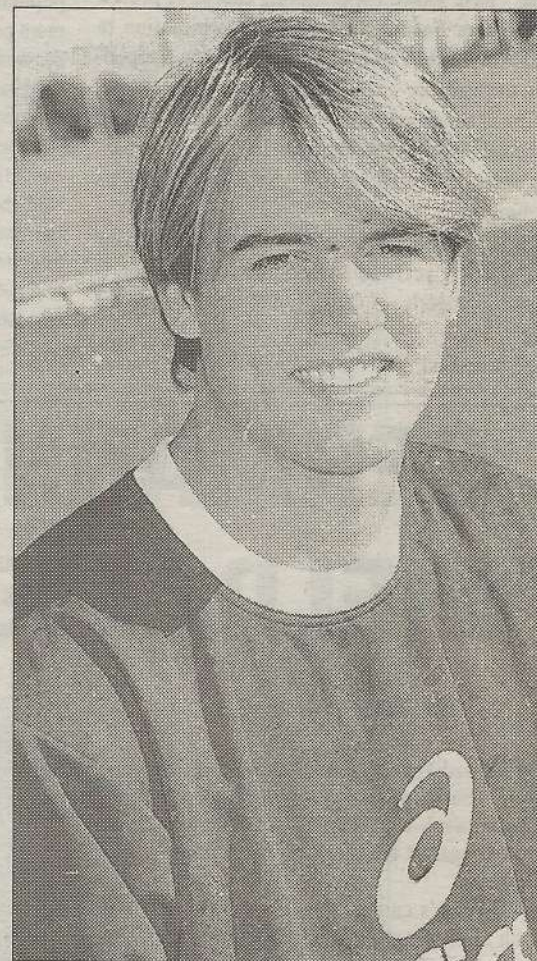
The lucky winner will travel with the team in February.

Pre match and half-time entertainment will include a spectacular fireworks display plus the dancing routine put on by the Parramatta Power Cheergirls.

The Parramatta Power Youth League also take on Sydney Olympic in the curtain raiser.

The Power Youth League team conceded a draw last week to NSWIS. They are still undefeated but now share equal first spot on the ladder with the AIS.

Gates open at 5pm with the Youth League game kicking off at 5.30pm followed by the NSL game at 7.30pm.



Joel Griffiths: Still in doubt with a shoulder injury.



THE POWER &



THE PASSION



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VS SYDNEY OLYMPIC

TUESDAY
DECEMBER 28

AT THE

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• GATES OPEN 5PM • YOUTH LEAGUE 5.30PM

• MAIN GAME 7.30PM

MEET THE
POWER PLAYERS
AFTER THE GAME

• CLOWNS • FACE PAINTING & FIREWORKS

• TICKETS AVAILABLE FROM ALL TICKETEK OUTLETS
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• FREE SHUTTLE BUS SERVICE
FROM PARRAMATTA STATION FROM 5.30PM

LAST CHANCE TO

WIN A HOLIDAY

BE AT THE GAME FOR YOUR LAST CHANCE TO WIN A
HOLIDAY PACKAGE FOR TWO TO NEW ZEALAND TO SEE THE POWER PLAY THE KINGZ IN JANUARY 2000

COSMOS FORESEE DISASTER

By Graham Cooke

Two senior National League club officials have joined the mounting chorus of protest over Soccer Australia's determination to bulldoze through its plans for a new-look competition next season.

The chairman of Canberra Cosmos, Ian Knop, said the second division introduced for 2000-01 in the manner advocated by the nation's governing body will be "disaster".

"The possibility of a viable second division exists, but in a few years' time after the first division is working properly — certainly not next season," he said.

"The second division is being viewed as a quick

fix, a convenient place to dump the surplus clubs when we cut the league back from 16 to 12, but I do not see the logic.

"We live in a country where the population is expanding, where more people are involved in soccer than ever before, so why the need to go backwards with our premier competition?"

Newcastle Breakers chief executive officer David Hall said the criteria for continued membership of the NSL, announced by Soccer Australia, will not do a thing to improve playing standards.

"We have lads of 17 going straight from the

Joey's to overseas clubs having never kicked a ball in the NSL," he said.

He called for a system similar to cricket whereby Socceroos were offered contracts by the national body to ensure they stayed in this country.

"I am not talking about the Mark Viduka's of this world, who will go overseas for vast sums of money," he said. "In many cases the clubs who produced them will get compensation through large transfer fees."

"But an awful lot of Australians are playing in competitions such as the Spanish second division or the English third

division, for little more than village teams, in the forlorn hope they will be noticed by bigger clubs.

"It would not take much for these players to be enticed to stay at home, and if there were just 16 of them, and they were spread among all the clubs in the NSL, that would result in a raising of the playing standards.

"There is absolutely no point in spending vast sums on marketing and promotion if the product remains the same. You don't fool people.

"And I don't see how reducing the number of clubs will improve anything. The same overheads will be born by a smaller number of stakeholders, and with three rounds, and some clubs required to visit Auckland and Perth twice, travelling costs will actually increase."



SERMANNI TO WIELD THE AXE

By Graham Cooke

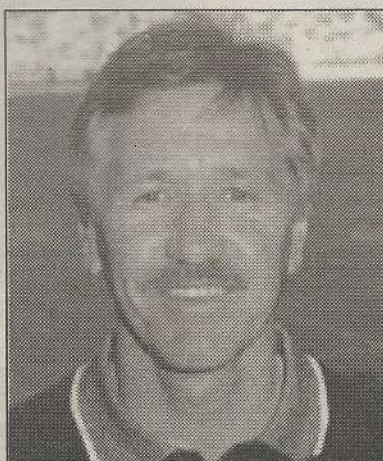
Canberra Cosmos coach Tom Sermanni is expected to name a much-changed side for tonight's match against Northern Spirit at Bruce Stadium.

The club's current blank run continued with a 3-0 loss at Wollongong Wolves last week — possibly Canberra's least convincing display of the season.

While there is some excuse in the top quality of the opposition in recent games — Carlton, Sydney Olympic and the informal Newcastle Breakers — the same cannot be said for tonight's visitors, or for matches during January against the likes of Auckland Kingz, Adelaide Force and Gippsland Falcons.

Sermanni knows points over the next few weeks are crucial if the club is not to sink back into the mire at the foot of the table.

He believes the Cosmos need a fresher image — and that may begin with Daniel Watkins and Glen Kolpak taking on the striking partnership, especially after the



Tom Sermanni: Ready to chop.

indifferent form of Michael Musitano.

David Arranz and Ilija Prenzowski, whose season has mostly been confined to the substitutes' bench, may also find themselves in the starting line-up. Less likely is Nick Purdue, who has been dogged by injury, but this is a player the coach clearly wants to see back in the reckoning as quickly as possible.

GIPPSLAND READY TO FIGHT

By Damian Tripodi

As Soccer Australia, the ruling body of the World game in this country decided to reduce the National League from the current 16 to 12 teams from the beginning of next season, the question of which clubs to be omitted is centred around the Gippsland Falcons.

So what's new?

"Falcons bashing" has been a fashionable pastime by city media ever since the provincial club was admitted to the National Soccer League some eight years ago.

In an Australia where the "action" basically occurs in the capital cities and their sprawling suburbs, for many, it is difficult to accept that clubs such as the Gippsland Falcons can be major players in affairs of significant National interest. It took the recent Victorian state elections to remind the "City Slickers" that their country cousins can be a force to reckon with.

The Gippsland Falcons is the only truly "country" club to perform in an Australian National competition, in any sport. The Club was admitted into the National League on its own merits and has performed admirably on and off the park ever since.

The media has had the club dead and buried many times over. However, by now they should have realised that the resilience and fighting spirit around the club is truly astonishing and indeed one of its major strengths, having each time defied the critics and going about its business and meeting all commitments in a most professional manner.

It is inevitable that Soccer Australia has to meet the challenges of a modern very changing world, therefore reforms are necessary. The criteria of change and the timing, however, is questionable. How did Soccer Australia arrive at the criteria? Would it appear that there may be some disunity within the ranks of the organization because the agreement for the reforms as they stand is not unanimous.

Soccer Australia states that the market place is saying that unless the reform takes place, it would be difficult to gain sponsorship, however, they will not divulge their source. Does Soccer Australia realise that by its very announcement, the smaller clubs are already on edge? The clubs are forever in quest of the sponsorship dollar and if there are clouds surrounding the futures of clubs which businesses and corporations would dare to make a long-term sponsorship commitment.

The clubs clearly should have been given more time to prepare for the reforms.

It appears that the clubs in danger are the traditional clubs, the very ones which carried Soccer for many years. By all indication it would appear that the private, corporate backed clubs are the ones favoured to carry Soccer into the future. This is a highly dangerous and precarious enterprise based not on traditional sporting rules, but the rule of the dollar and, as with all private business, the moment the dollar is not there, the business would be likely to close.

The issue of a second division raises a question mark. Whilst the idea of promotion and relegation has sound merits, it must be remembered that in Australia, only the sports in the forefront and the highest level draw crowds.

A second division on paper sounds good, however, as has been the pattern in other sports, it will undoubtedly be seen as

second rate and will not draw crowds or major sponsors. One only has to look at so called major sports such as Australian Rules Football and Cricket. Apart from the AFL, there's no interest and in Cricket, apart from the times where an Australian National team plays, where are the crowds?

Perhaps Soccer Australia should consider staying with the status quo and gradually introduce a promotion and relegation system involving a play-off between the champion teams of the various State Leagues.

The clubs like the Gippsland Falcons, however, which were built by the people and ran by the members have more staying power. They came up via the hard road, through the ranks. These clubs have a purpose, they are resilient.

The Gippsland Falcons rose from humble beginnings to having one of the best sporting complexes in Australia, certainly in regional Australia. Whilst the club cherishes its heritage, it has always moved forward. The club owns its own facilities (how many sports clubs in Australia can boast that fact), thanks to men of great vision.

The club headquarters and stadium nestle on 40 acres of prime real estate on the edge of Morwell. Up to the purchase the club had a long lease, but the dynamic and visionary President of the day Don Di Fabrizio and his committee after intense negotiations bought the land, which today is worth several millions of dollars. It boasts a magnificent stadium with entertainment and administrative facilities which are the envy of many visiting clubs. It has facilities to cater for junior Soccer to which the club is committed.

The club is now in the first phase of turning the property into a multi purpose sports and entertainment facility incorporating several other sports. Already representatives from basketball, golf, netball, hockey and Australian rules football have given their approval in principle.

On the field, since entering the National League, the club has enjoyed moderate success, having reached the finals in its third year in the league.

The Gippsland Falcons have earned a reputation of being a "producing" club. One only has to look at how many champion players throughout Australia have had their National League baptism in Gippsland.

A major factor affecting the area is that, not much of the government revenue from sales to private enterprise has returned to the region. As a consequence, young people have had to move to Melbourne for work and the whole area has been affected. Where once it was easy for a man and his family to enjoy Saturday night with dinner, the game and post-game entertainment at the Falcons, it is more difficult now. It is true that the crowds are down, but they are alarmingly down throughout Australia, nevertheless the Falcons have been able to survive and are intent on continuing to do so.

To meet the new challenges, the administration of the club is made up of a blend of people with business, entrepreneurial, entertainment and of course Soccer acumen. Most of the players now live locally.

Gippslanders recognise the Falcons is the only institution, sporting and otherwise which takes the profile of the region to national and international levels. They will not allow a group of Soccer administrators based elsewhere in Australia to take this institution away from them. They will fight to the end.



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BLANCO'S OLYMPIC TEAM

(continued from page 1)

By John Economos

In the Tournament Australia will do combat with current Olympic Champions Nigeria, South Korea and Egypt. The tournament will be a four-way round-robin tournament played in early January.

Australian Olympic Squad

Surname	Name	Club
ALLSOP	Daniel	Manchester City FC
BASER	Tansel	Trabzonspor FC
BOSNAR	Eddy	Sydney United FC
BRESCIANO	Marco	Empoli FC
BURNS	Jacob	Parramatta Power SC
COYNE	Chris	West Ham FC
CULINA	Jason	AFC Ajax
DAMIANOS	Bill	Xanthi Skoda FC
DIDULICA	Joseph	AFC Ajax
EMERTON	Brett	Sydney Olympic SC
FOX	Hayden	Sanfrecce Hiroshima
GRELLA	Vince	Empoli FC
LAYBUTT	Stephen	Bellmare Hiratsuka/ Parramatta Power SC
NEILL	Lucas	Millwall FC
RIZZO	Nick	Crystal Palace FC
STERJOVSKI	Mile	Parramatta Power SC
WEHRMAN	Kasey	Perth Glory SC
ZANE	Clayton	Molde FC
ZELIC	Ivan	Adelaide Force SC
ZOIS	Peter	NAC Breda

Adelaide has been confirmed as the host city, with the remodelled and completely upgraded Hindmarsh Stadium to be the host venue for next month's 4-Nation Under-23 Soccer Tournament.

Australia's Olympic Team Coach Raul Blanco last week announced his 20-man squad for the upcoming Four-Nation Under-23 Tournament to



Eddy Bosnar: First time call-up.

The Draw is:

Sunday 9/1/2000
6.00pm Egypt vs South Korea
8.15pm AUSTRALIA vs Nigeria

Wednesday 12/1/2000
6.00pm South Korea v Nigeria
8.15pm AUSTRALIA v Egypt

Saturday 15/1/2000
6pm Nigeria v Egypt
8.15pm AUSTRALIA v South Korea.



Mile Sterjovski: Star striker.

be staged in Australia next month. The first set of matches have been scheduled for Sunday 9th January 2000.

"We're all really looking forward to playing in front of a home crowd again," stated the Olympic Captain Brett Emerton.

"Our last few tournaments have been played overseas, so it will be great to have the support of our own fans right behind us, particularly with the 2000 Games being just nine months away.

"The squad that Raul (Blanco) has announced is virtually full-strength. Every player will still be taking this opportunity to try and impress because nothing is guaranteed in football.

"Added to this is the fact that the current Olympic Champions Nigeria are coming. Egypt could be a surprise factor as we've never played them before.

"We have a point to prove against the Koreans, and this tournament is going to be big," concluded Emerton.

Newcastle Breakers v Sydney United



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6.00PM
AT THE
BREAKERS'
STADIUM



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Youth
League
Kick-Off
4.00pm

(Gates Open
3.30pm)



Brett Hughes



Shane Pryce



Velimir Kupresak



Todd McManus



Eddy Bosnar



Andy Harper



Tommy Pondeljak



Lee Sterrey



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TRIMBOLI IS BACK

By Bert van Bedaf

An exhausted but relieved South Melbourne captain Paul Trimboli was overjoyed to have gotten through the entire match against the Wolves after a seven-week injury marred lay-off.

"I needed the 90 minutes. The leg (calf strain that kept him out) feels pretty good. It felt tight towards the end but that's not surprising, considering I haven't played for seven weeks," Trimboli said.

Here and there, now and then, were those touches on display that have made Trimboli such an admired player. But they could not lift the team to a desired win against the hungry Wolves, having to settle for a last gasp 1-1 draw.

"We got something out of the game, but it is disappointing because we need the points," Trimboli said.

He admitted that the World Cup for clubs tournament in Brazil next month, with matches against Manchester United and Vasco de Gama coming up, was telling on the minds of the players.



Paul Trimboli: Comeback.

"We're disappointed in the way we're going at the moment. We're not used to it. We're setting ourselves high standards and we're struggling in the domestic competition," Trimboli said.

"We've just got to make sure we're turning it around and get back up the ladder. The longer you stay in a lower spot, the harder it gets to get out.

"Then there's too much pressure

on each game and when things do not go your way, you're trying too hard. You're trying to force things. That's our main concern, even though in the back of your mind there's also Brazil.

"There's a mixture of excitement and a bit of trepidation, really.

Especially since we watch them (Man. United) on the English soccer program every week and they're very impressive as everybody knows.

"And everyday we hear new reports about who Vasco de Gama is signing up.

"They already signed Romario. So there is a mixture of excitement and nervousness about the games, of what to expect.

"But I'm sure we'll give a good account of ourselves. It's hard to say how we will go, because we have nothing to judge it by. There's no precedent. We can't say 'last time this happened'.

"Of course, it's an honour for us. But the boys also worked hard for it. We earned our spot. We'll just go out and enjoy the experience and hopefully come back home a bit refreshed to challenge for the top six," South's popular captain said.


Euro 2000

EURO 2000


Euro 2000

*** Special Feature ***

EUROPE'S MILLENNIUM TITLE PROMISES A TIGHT CONTEST

Euro 2000, the European championship for nations, kicks off in June, 2000. Melbourne editor Bert van Bedaf takes an early look at the 16-nation contest.

In Europe, the countdown is in full swing towards Euro 2000, the quest for the continent's championship of nations. Costs for staging the tournament have been budgeted below \$125 million, which is said to be a modest outlay.

To be hosted for the first time by two countries, Holland and Belgium, the opening match will be between Belgium and Sweden at the King Baudouin stadium in Brussels on June 10. Thirty matches later, the final will be staged at "De Kuip", the Feyenoord stadium in Rotterdam on July 2.

The other six of the eight stadiums where games will be held are the Ajax ArenA in Amsterdam, the Gelredome in Arnhem (the new home of first division club Vitesse), the Jan Breydel stadium of FC Bruges, the Municipal stadium in Charleroi, PSV Eindhoven's Philips stadium and the Liege Sclessin stadium.

In just over three weeks either a successor will emerge to Germany, who beat the Czech Republic at London's Wembley stadium in 1996, or Europe's most successful soccer nation may well clinch back-to-back titles.

Much has been made of Germany's Group A clash with England. The two powerhouses fought out a penalty shootout in 1996, which put Germany on the road to European victory and England out of the contest.

Romania and Portugal are also in Group A, with the Portuguese as the third contender for a place among the last eight. Only the top two countries of each group will progress to the quarter finals.



In Group B, Belgium faces a tough job to progress against Sweden and Italy, with Turkey the likely loser. Group C sees Spain and Norway as favourites, with Yugoslavia the danger nation and Slovenia the unlucky last.

Fireworks are expected from Group B, where 1988 champion and co-host

Holland is bunched with the Czech Republic (last year's losing finalist and first qualifier this time round), reigning World Cup champion and former European champion France, as well as 1992 European champion Denmark.

Holland lost in Sweden in 1992 to Denmark in the semi-finals, when Marco van Basten missed his spot-kick in the penalty shoot-out. Denmark went on to beat Germany in the final.

Moods are mixed so far. England coach Kevin Keegan tipped England and Germany to progress to the quarter finals. "There are two teams that go through (from each group). I can't see any reason why both of us can't get through."

Italy coach Dino Zoff pointed to Sweden (who beat England in the qualifying rounds) as a possible title candidate. "Sweden qualified in great style. They will be a great adversary," he said.

Germany coach Erich Ribbeck has his eyes on Portugal. "Portugal is a great football side. They play lovely football, something we're trying to do," he said.

Bookmakers have Holland in the lead at 7/2 favourites, with Italy 9/2. On form the Czech Republic should be making a strong bid and world champion France cannot be overlooked, proving that the millennium championship is shaping up as a tight contest.

The first European title, among 17 nations, was staged in 1960. The final between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia was held in Paris on July 10.

An Englishman, Arthur Ellis, refereed the final and the Soviets ran out winners in extra time to become the first European champions. Heroes for the Soviets were legendary goal keeper Lev Yashin and scorer Viktor Ponedelnik.

In 40 years, the championship has developed into a mini world cup, obviously without the South-American nations and the emerging African countries. But it

is a significant encounter among the most prominent soccer nations in the world.

The European championship holds major status, capturing a worldwide market. It is estimated that an accumulated audience of seven billion people will have watched the 31 matches over 40 viewing hours.

THE PRIZE



Economically, the tournament also proves a huge tourism boost to the host nation(s). Figures released after Euro 96 showed added revenue across most retail sectors.

Supermarket spending was up by 55 per cent. Fast food sales were up by more than 80 per cent. Clothing and other textile sales rose by seven per cent. Hotel occupancy doubled in host cities. And significantly, Value Added Tax (England's equivalent to Australia's dreaded GST) poured about \$80 million into Britain's coffers.

The biggest fear to spoil the Dutch/Belgian party is hooliganism. Next to England and Germany, the Dutch have been struggling with a serious hooligan element for several years. It has mainly manifested itself at club level and not at international matches. At Euro 96, the Orange brigade was voted the most popular supporters group.

UEFA is keeping a keen eye on soccer violence in the run up to Euro 2000. When Feyenoord supporters clashed with police last April, soccer's European governing body stepped in quickly, saying it had "complete confidence that Dutch and Belgian authorities were capable of running a safe Euro 2000".

Last October, the Dutch government-sponsored Central Hooligan Information Bureau uncovered an internet site, calling

on Dutch soccer club members to "form a Dutch army ahead of Euro 2000".

The bureau monitors hooliganism in the Netherlands and produced some startling statistics in its annual report. For example, in 1998-99, 251 more hooligans were arrested than during the previous season, for a total of 1,546 arrests, with the highest number among Feyenoord supporters.

This, of course, has created concern, considering Rotterdam's Feyenoord stadium is a major host venue, including staging the final.

Organisers are keen to hose down any perception Euro 2000 heading for chaos, violence or disaster. "Euro 2000 is on the right track," declared Belgian tournament director Alain Courtis.

"There will be tight security to prevent crowd trouble and a fair ticketing policy (for 1.2 million available tickets) will be in place," he said.

The many logistics of the tournament sometimes boggle even Courtis' mind.

"We know how to hold 31 matches. But there's more we have to deal with."

"There's also the hotels, transport, media accreditation, cameras, broadcasting facilities, hospitality, security and commercial partners to consider," he said.

Euro 2000 has lined up seven major sponsors to ensure secure financial backing. McDonald's, Carlsberg beer, Mastercard, Coca-Cola, JVC, Fujifilm and Philips will be the names most prominently seen at the stadiums and on world television.

Not surprisingly, what is uppermost on government minds in not the sporting element of the contest, but income tax, apart from the pay-as-you-buy myriad of value added taxes.

All too often, international athletes — tennis, track and field, as well as soccer — have left host countries with their gross earnings. But Dutch finance minister Gerrit Zalm wants to put a stop to that, insisting the Euro 2000 stars pay their due before they leave.

"Players are supposed to pay tax, but it's very difficult to track them down once they've left the country," a finance spokesperson commented.

The tax chase is compounded by the fact that the tournament involves two host countries and therefore two tax systems. The Dutch and Belgian governments are working towards a single tax rate to put their revenues in order.

It shows how complex sport has become. Winning, losing, profit, loss, hooliganism, ticketing and taxes — major sports events aren't all beer and skittles. They're serious business, anywhere.

In 2004, the tournament will move to Portugal, who beat Spain and a joint bid by Austria and Hungary, when the announcement was made last October. By then it will be someone else's headache how to stage a big tournament — and another round of nations to contest Europe's premier crown.

HONOUR ROLL

PAST WINNERS

1960	USSR	v	Yugoslavia	2-1
1964	Spain	v	USSR	2-1
1968	Italy	v	Yugoslavia	0-0 (1-0 rep.)
1972	Germany	v	USSR	3-0
1976	Czech Rep.	v	Germany	2-2
1980	Germany	v	Belgium	2-1
1984	France	v	Spain	2-0
1988	Holland	v	USSR	2-0
1992	Denmark	v	Germany	2-0
1996	Germany	v	Czech Rep.	2-1

MOORE TIME FOR GLENN

Glenn Moore

Nickname: Moorey
Born: February 24, 1977 in Australia
Height: 189cm
Weight: 88kgs
Eye Colour: Hazel
Hair Colour: Brown
Occupation: Engineer
Employer: Industrial Automation Services, Teralba - Lake Macquarie
Hobbies/Interests: Music, golf
Year Joined: 1999
Position: Defender/Midfield
Previous Clubs: Newcastle Breakers - 1996/97; Broadmeadow Magic - 1997; Edgeworth Eagles - 1998/99
Representative Honours: NSW U/20 - 1997; Northern NSW - 1997/98/99
NSL Games prior to 1999/2000: 15
Major Injuries: Nil
Ambitions: Play to full potential

Information courtesy of the Newcastle Breakers Souvenir Programme available from the 'Jersey Joint' at Breakers Stadium.

By Greg Danvers

A two year break from the NSL has allowed Glenn Moore to complete his university studies and now concentrate on being part of the Newcastle Breakers as they press for a first ever finals series berth.

"Previously both my football and studies suffered," Moore explained of his decision to take a break from the NSL in 1997.

"I wasn't able to put the time and effort into

either and as a result both suffered.

"So I decided to have a couple of years off and then comeback."

Recently Moore completed his studies and exams and will graduate in the New Year with a degree in Computer Science.

During his break from the NSL Moore played in the Northern NSW NBN Soccer League with Broadmeadow Magic and Edgeworth Eagles.

Moore played with Premiers Broadmeadow in 1997 and back to back Premiers Edgeworth in 1998 and 1999. During that time Moore also represented Northern NSW in the annual NSW v Northern NSW matches as well as the Steel City Challenges between Newcastle and Illawarra.

Breakers coach Lee Sterrey kept an eye on Moore in the local competition and offered him the opportunity this season to resurrect his NSL career and after a few games in the youth league came-back against Canberra at Bruce Stadium in round nine.

The return to the NSL coincided with the start to the Breakers run of four wins on the trot and also the one-week suspension of captain and sweeper Shane Pryce.

Sterrey slotted Moore into sweeper and his faith was justified as Moore has played exceptionally well since, so well that Pryce has been shifted to right back.

Since the 1-2 win over Canberra the Breakers have beaten Brisbane 2-1, Parramatta 0-1 and Perth 3-2 conceding only four goals with Moore an integral part of the defence.

Prior to round nine the Breakers had conceded 13 goals.

"Glenn Moore has made a huge difference to our back-line," Breakers coach Lee Sterrey said.

"He is sensational in the air, has great communication skills and also he can play a bit on the ball.

"When we start to play a bit he will start to be released now and again."

The Breakers have turned their season around, to date, on the back of a team effort playing for one another, the team colours and the town. What they appear to lack in individual brilliance they certainly make up for in determination, passion and commitment.

"We are not overawed by any team," Moore said.

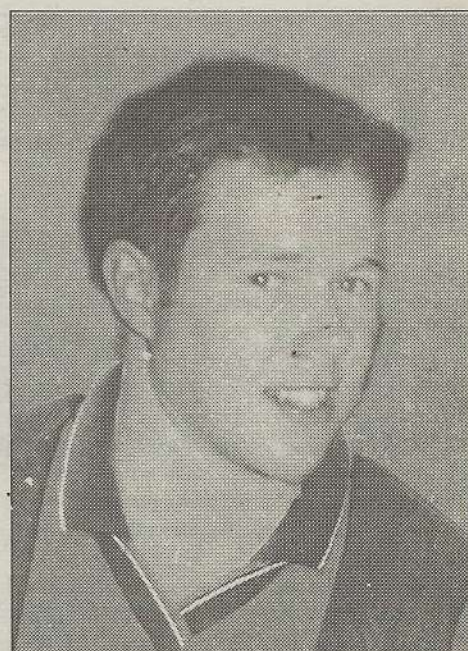
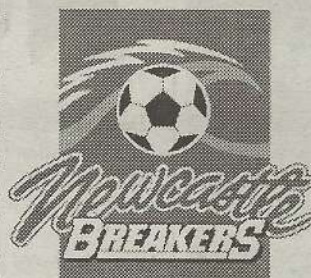
"We probably haven't got the natural ability of other sides but as a collective group we have definitely got the determination and the street fighting qualities and are prepared to back ourselves against anyone.

"We look to a team performance more than individual efforts.

Newcastle Breakers, to give themselves every chance of winning tonight (Tuesday) against Carlton, flew into Melbourne on Boxing Day and are pumped to bring something, whether it is a point or three, home.

"Carlton are a tough side, we will go down there with the same attitude as against Parramatta," Moore said of the game.

"We will be prepared to battle out there for 90 minutes. If we can keep them scoreless, maybe pinch a goal, or maybe just get a point out of the game."



Glenn Moore: Career resurrected.

The premier web site for Sport in the Hunter Valley owned and edited by GREG DANVERS.

The huntersportsdesk covers sport in the Hunter Valley and includes an extensive Newcastle Breakers section. The aim is to provide all sport in the Hunter with an electronic news service.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DUMP SEVEN

Dear Sir,

With amazing accuracy based on facts I predicted in early '99 that the series of sham exhibition matches the no show ALL STARS, Man. Utd and BRAZIL would end in grief and not be repeated.

For countless years the various overseas Football Associations and clubs when touring Australia have treated local fans with total contempt.

They would have us believe that they are doing us a favour by sending understrength teams in holiday mode going through the motions of pretending to play serious football and charging the earth for the privilege.

Fortunately the Oz soccer public will not be fooled anymore.

Rene Rivkin — the Man Utd tour promoter (who is forever assuring all and sundry that he made a profit) has now suddenly discovered the pitfalls of being a soccer promoter and making a profit.

A great bone of contention is the TV contract between Channel Seven and SA, another David Hill legacy.

Even the most stupid of Oz soccer fans must now realise what a disaster the TV contract with Seven is for the game. Rene Rivkin is a very well connected businessman who could be very useful in unwinding this onerous contract.



Rene Rivkin: Promoter

Surely Channel Seven would be happy to be rid of soccer in the right circumstances.

Let us hope things will happen that will bring this about and close the book on another of David Hill's disastrous decisions.

R Melor,
Bondi. NSW.

Gee, I don't quite know in which capacity you can be so sure that nobody made any money from the three tours you mentioned. Maybe you work for Mr. Rivkin and you know something we don't.

I do agree that channel Seven should be axed but I don't think it is Mr. Rivkin's problem. He didn't dig that hole, so I don't think he should have to call in the dirt trucks to fill it up. - Ed



IT'S JUST NOT RUGBY

Dear Sir,

Well it didn't take long for the clubs to kick up a stink about the so-called criteria announced by Soccer Australia, and who can blame them.

It's all very well to try and strengthen the competition, plus avoid insolvency problems mid-season with clubs, but it's bordering on the ridiculous if the bar is set so high with only three or four clubs really able to achieve the criteria in full.

You can't run a competition with only that many. Obviously what they want to do is rate them in order from one to 16 along the NRL lines then eliminate the bottom four.

However, with the criteria set in such a way that guarantees certain clubs membership along geographical lines, its obvious who the four targeted clubs are.

What surprises me is that in theory you would get a stronger competition with less teams but in practice it may not work that way with soccer, as it would with say Rugby League.

The difference is that the world game can provide a lot more opportunities through dozens of top notch football countries around the world than either Rugby League or Aussie Rules can.

In other words the drain will continue with our soccer players to an even greater extent.

The reality is that soccer isn't strong enough in this country to start chopping out a number of club's in a hurry as rugby league has done.

There are only two major success stories in the NSL at the moment as far as crowd support goes.

We need to find at least five or six more before talking about a reduced size competition.

In other words expand before you contract not the other way around. If that means 18 or 20 teams in the NSL, so be it.

The talk of having a 10 or 12 team Second Division won't placate the club owners or CEO's in danger, as they know that Soccer Australia is only using that as a way of avoiding legal challenges.

Anyone with an ounce of brains knows that a Second Division would not last more than one season at a national level, otherwise it would have been operating for the past 20 years.

With the Olympic Soccer tournament on next September, all clubs need at least another season after this one, to show if they can capitalise on the soccer fever that will happen during the Olympic Games, especially Canberra and Adelaide.

Stability and continued expansion is what's needed over the next two years, with two Conferences if necessary.

Perth Glory doesn't need to play NSW teams to get a crowd, nor does the Spirit need to play Victorian or other Southern teams to draw a crowd at home either. Instability and shrinkage is not what's needed at this stage of Soccer's progression.

Rugby League may be able to get away with it, but I doubt whether soccer can at this stage.

Dominic Scullino,
Nerang, Qld.

Do you really think they'd have a league with three or four teams? Wait here's a better one. Let's just have two teams and play only the grand final. At least there will be a healthy crowd.

But your real doozy has to be 20 teams. Are you serious? Twenty teams? In the space of 15 seconds you went from 3 teams to 20. I just cannot ever see 20 teams working. It didn't even work in the Premier League!!!

You are right about one thing though. Soccer is not like Rugby League. Thank God for that!!! - Ed

Send letters to Australian and British Soccer Weekly

PO Box 155

Marrickville NSW 2204 or fax (02) 9550 9332

or e-mail to: soccerweekly@hotmail.com

FREE COUNTRY

Dear Sir,

Just recently at the Sydney United vs Parramatta Power clash the Bad Blue Boys Sydney were stripped of their flags and signs.

The police threatened us to take them down or lose them permanently.

They shouldn't be able to do that for the simple fact that this is Australia and it is a free country. Also, it is a Croatian Club no matter what anyone says, it has always been a Croatian club and always will be.

Tom Olic,
Edensor Park. NSW.

Tom, you are right this is a free country. You are partially right when you say Sydney United is a Croatian club. Hajduk Split and Croatia Zagreb are Croatian clubs. Sydney United is NOT a Croatian club.

It is an AUSTRALIAN club with a proud heritage of backing and support from the Croatian-Australian community at large. I'm sure the other 'boys in blue' were just doing their job. - Ed

BATTLE OF THE SEXES

Dear Sir,

In response to Kirk Houghton (December 14) I can tell you that men's brains are in their backsides and downstairs departments.

Is it any wonder why males are so inferior and women are the more fairer and superior sex.

In fact if there was a battle of the sexes between the Socceroos and Matildas, I'll be cheering for the Matildas and no doubt that will show up the macho males. Wouldn't you agree Kirk?

Dave Meehan,
Belconnen, ACT.

Dave, did a radical group of male-knocking women put you up to this? Are you being held for ransom? Or a hostage maybe?

You seem to be really upset with all of those of your same sex.

Or are you really a male? C'mon talk to me Dave, what's the problem? C'mon Dave...if that is in fact your real name. - Ed



CAN YOU STUMP THE EDITOR

See Page 21

WOLLONGONG NEWS

Wollongong's soccer fraternity is up in arms. They are greatly disturbed by reports that the Wolves are under threat of being excluded from the National Soccer league next year.

It is ludicrous for Soccer Australia to even consider axing Wollongong. Surely the



Nick Theodorakopoulos: Could be unemployed next season.

league's general manager Stefan Kamasz and chairman Basil Scarsella have enough common sense to keep a striving soccer club with a huge junior pool - approximately 8000 kids are playing club soccer in Illawarra - in the NSL.

Quite honestly one could think Soccer Australia has rocks in their heads if they leave the Wolves hanging in limbo.

Wolves general manager Graeme Haney said last week the phone was running non-stop with an enormous reaction in the area to reports of excluding the Wolves.

Not only regular supporters but also business people and soccer fans not always coming to games are lending support. The Wolves perhaps may need to engage their local MP to lobby on their behalf.

Without the Wolves in NSL, soccer would experience a severe set-back in Illawarra. We all hope common sense prevails.

Soccer locally is thriving with Illawarra Premier league clubs, particularly the well heeled ones moving in to sign experienced players on alleged top match payments.

Kemblawarra has topped the list with their well respected coach John Fleming - a former NSL mentor with Wollongong City - attracting some top players to the club for

next season. Other clubs have not been idle in strengthening their squads. It promises to develop into an interesting competition in 2000.

The first division clubs are already in training and can be considered as a springboard for promising youngsters to make an impression in local soccer.

There is a lot of activity going on behind the scenes. South of

Wollongong in the Shellharbour City area a merger has taken place

between lower division club Albion Park and Premier league club

White Eagles which hopefully will lift the interest of local fans and bring top soccer to Albion Park.

Ron Corry - former Australian International goalkeeper - is assistant coach with the Wolves.

He specialises in training the keepers not only for the local team but also for the current Australian National side.

Wolves keeper Les Pogliacomi, Daniel Beltrame and the youth grade goal keepers are being put through a rigorous program at training nights.

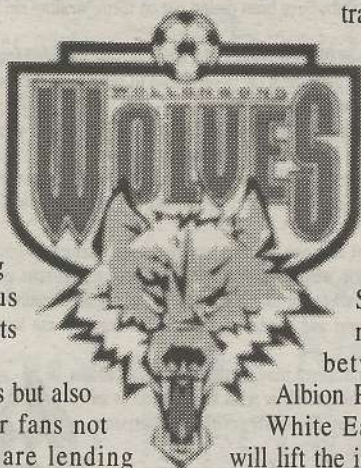
Summer soccer camps are being promoted by Wolves captain Matt

Horsley with the help of first grade players. The first of two camps will be held at Brandon Park from January 4-6.

The second one to be arranged for January 10-12 at Kiama Leisure Centre. Hundreds of youngsters of all age groups are expected going by this year's inaugural soccer clinics which were swamped and well received.

One last word on the Wolves' colourful match day program which has attracted the attention of others and mainly Soccer Australia.

The booklet is not only nice looking but also informative, a credit to the marketing people of the Wollongong club, a real showpiece of how a match program should look and it is even free of charge.



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METRO STARS TO SHINE

By Allan Crisp

Newly promoted South Australian club North East Metro Stars are aiming high to impress in their Premier League debut season.

Stars coach Mario Boffa has secured four top class performers to bolster his squad, but has lost his most experienced player, Paul Beltrame.

The former Marconi and Campbelltown City midfielder has accepted a job transfer to the USA where he will spend the next eight to 12 months as an exchange physical education teacher.

"It's very disappointing to have lost Paul," Boffa said. "That's why we went after Campbelltown City captain Tony Scalzi."

Scalzi joins Sergio Melta Medal winner John Fontanarosa from Croydon Kings, Elizabeth City Rams goalkeeper Ben Moore and Salisbury United's Vince Schimizzi as prize captures for the 2000 championship campaign.

Boffa is also seeking a stopper and has narrowed his search to a choice between Steve Ingham of Elizabeth City and Trent Brotherton from Birkalla.



"We were lucky to get Tony (Scalzi)," Boffa said. "He was still under contract to Campbelltown and in the end it came down to dollars."

Boffa will carry the philosophy that won Metro Stars promotion from the State League into the new environment of the tougher Premier League.

"It's important to win games, but it's also important to play attractive football and to entertain," he said.

"I would far sooner win a game 4-2 than to scrape in by a 1-0 margin and not satisfy yourself, the club management, or the supporters."

Boffa clinched Scalzi's signature on a two-year contract after the skilful midfielder had served the Campbelltown Red Devils as their captain for an outstanding four-season stint.

All up, Scalzi, 29, had been with the Newton Sports Field for 14 seasons.

"The main reason I changed was that I was getting a bit stale and wanted a change of scenery," Scalzi said.

"When your heart isn't there any more, you're better off making a move or quitting."

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1999: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

SYDNEY OLYMPIC

By Daniel Giorelano

Sydney Olympic, the sleeping giants of Australian soccer have woken from their deep sleep over the last few years to make a bold statement, to the rest of the field, catch us if you can.

The league pace setters have played an entertaining and intelligent brand of football so far this season as well as having the best defensive record, conceding only nine goals in 12 games.

Olympic's away record is also the envy of all their fellow opponents, with wins out of six, the league's best to date, although their away loss to the improving Melbourne Knights in round nine, did come as a surprise.

Olympic's only other loss came in round six at home to the leagues west club Auckland as the Kiwi's recorded their first victory on Australian soil.

But apart from their two losses and two draws, Olympic have won their remaining eight games and in some style, the biggest win of the season, a 4-0 away win at Wollongong.

Other impressive wins include a tough 2-1 derby win against Marconi and a comfortable last start 2-0 home win against previous leaders Brisbane Roar.

But whilst all is travelling well on the field for Olympic, off field politics has once again dominated the club's headlines.

The departure of General Manager Frank Martin only two weeks ago and uncertainty about the club's future in a new revamped soccer league as well as falling attendances has meant that Olympic like so many other clubs are struggling financially.

The club however have made some bold and very original ideas to create more crowd support as well as helping the team succeed on the park.

The boldest move, the call up of former Welsh and Liverpool legend, Ian Rush to play two guest matches for the Blues.

Whilst the Rush venture failed to pay off financially, a reported \$80,000 bid to Rush for his two-game stint, on the park Olympic picked up two valuable home wins, to go with their home record of three wins, two draws and a loss.

Olympic have been superbly led around the park by Argentinian ace Pabito Cardozo who has stood out as the club's best player to date this season.

However Cardozo's long term future may be coming to an end, speculation over a possible transfer to Spanish Second division club, Cordoba still in the air.

Should Cardozo depart, his creativity in midfield would be greatly missed, although Olympic will be looking towards players of the calibre of Ariel Mendez, Brett Emerton and Norman Tome to stand up and take control.

And after 12 rounds, it is silly to say that the top of the table Olympic are 'fait accompli' to make the finals.

Olympic have in years gone by somehow managed new ways to eliminate themselves from the qualifying for the finals campaign.

Hopefully this year will be different, and going on the form they have shown so far this season, a finals series with Sydney Olympic involved looks like a card.



MELBOURNE KNIGHTS

By Bert van Bedaf

There were times when a mongrel dog got a better welcome at the Melbourne Knights than visiting teams.

But during the last two seasons the once feared Knights have been acting like puppies and rival clubs have been dining out on them, stealing the biscuits out of the tray.

Currently 12th on the NSL ladder, the Knights have gathered four wins and a draw so far. Seven losses gave them the poorest start to any one of their seasons in the NSL and it cost coach Joe Biskic his job.

It followed a trend that was started last season. Then there was the amicable but hapless Vid Horvat. He was fired when losses mounted.

Legendary player Joe Biskic got the nod and he got the demoralised Knights going towards the end. Things looked promising for this season. But the start was disastrous.

The club went through a fairly acrimonious change of committee and as a consequence Biskic was appointed belatedly close to the start of the season. As a result preparation was poor and it showed in the negative results. Biskic recognised the disgruntled signs and handed in his notice before the axe would have fallen on him.

Enter another former player, the mercurial Vlado Vanis. He was itching to show what he could do as an NSL coach and put all of his inspiring charisma behind the Knights.

"I want no puppies, no babies, no nice boys, I want animals. From now on the Knights are going to be like animals and fight and win," nonsense Vanis declared — and as if by hypnotic design the Knights did win, at least twice in row.

There has not been such commitment seen at Knights stadium since the Christians recovered the Holy Lands during the Crusades.

Nevertheless, after a couple of wins, the Knights fell back to earth with a home loss to the Northern Spirit. They should have beaten the Auckland Kingz the following week, but ended up drawing a roller-coaster game.

On field, the Knights added Nigerian stopper Murtala Abbas to the squad, but lost midfielder Zeljko Susa to Spain. It seriously narrowed the field on genuine talent to a few, but it has not lessened the fighting spirit of the team. Particularly, experienced midfielder Mark Silic has sounded motivated and determined to lead from the front.

Striker Ivan Kelic is hitting form after an indifferent last season.

With six goals so far, Kelic is sure to add to his tally in the new year.

He should get ample assistance from Adrian Cervinski, whose return to the Knights has proved his home is at Sunshine. New Zealander Paul Urlovic will return to the squad after scoring a hat-trick for his country's 4-1 Olympic victory over the Solomon Islands on December 20. New Zealand must now play the fourth-best African country home and away to qualify for Sydney 2000.

Off-field, the battle to stay in the NSL is gathering pace and the Knights are also one of the clubs whose credentials will be closely scrutinised.

Knights president Tony Karlusic was equally in favor, with the rest of the clubs, of deferring a reduction from 16 to 12 teams by a season. "It would give clubs time to meet the criteria," Karlusic said.

Said to be on SA's cull list, the Knights are one of the few clubs in the league who can boast a debt free ledger (thanks to the on-sale of Mark Viduka from Croatia to Celtic). They also who their own stadium and have a regular following, largely from its Croatian beginnings, but expanding to a wider public under the new committee.

Karlusic agreed more effort needed to be put in marketing and financial management. "Clubs need to make sure they are run soundly financially and not disappear from the league like West Adelaide. That only brings the league into chaos," he said.



NEWCASTLE BREAKERS

by Greg Danvers

In 1999 proved to be a very successful year for the Newcastle Breakers.

Eighth, five points outside the top six, on 40 points scoring 29 and conceding 33 goals in their 11 win - 7 draw - 10 loss record in the 1998-99 NSL season.

The eighth place was the best of the Breakers since they came into the League.

Giant 'keeper Bob Catlin was a finalist in the NSL Goalkeeper of the Season award and at club level he received the 'Players Player' and the Supporters Club 'Player of the Year' award.

Newcastle born Sydney based businessman David Hall took control of the club in June providing a sound financial future for the club allowing the hard work and financial contributions of Bill Collins and the Breakers Syndicate to realise their dream of having a top flight NSL team in Newcastle.

Coach Lee Sterrey was signed for one season not long after David Hall took the reigns at the Breakers and then his contract was extended a further two years in October.

Captain and quite achiever Shane Pryce joined fellow club centurions Ralph Maier, Andy Roberts and Glenn Sprodd playing his one-hundredth NSL game for the Breakers in the 2-0 win over Northern Spirit.

The Breakers celebrated their one-hundredth NSL home match at Breakers Stadium with a 2-1 win over the then unbeaten Brisbane Strikers, their first home win of the season and against former coach John Kosmina. It doesn't get much better!

High profile and workaholic striker Andy Harper signed with the club to add some punch up front. The partnership between Harper and John 'Jockey' Buonavoglia has been outstanding with Jockey scoring seven goals from 12 appearances so far in 1999.

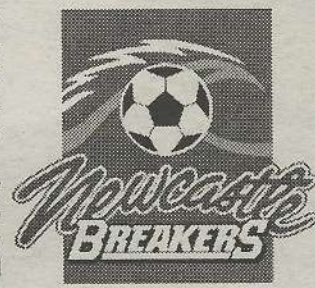
On the youth development front Peter Woods, Mitchell Johnson and Joel Grenell have been offered AIS scholarships. Wood is already there while Johnson and Grenell go into the AIS in January.

The Breakers 13's and 16's, playing in the NSW Super Youth League, made the play-offs with both bowing out in the final.

In the year 2000, the Breakers will look to continue along the platform laid over the past 12 months remaining miserly in defence and improving their ball play with the goal of making the top six.

"We are looking to make the top six," Newcastle coach Lee Sterrey said.

"We are working to improve our forward play but certainly keep a good defensive record, you have got to put up your back fence first," he ended.



SOUTH MELBOURNE

By Bert van Bedaf

Back-to-back and Oceania champion South Melbourne has not been travelling well. It has lost five games and drawn one on the road and is now also struggling at home. Its home record was unsurpassed, until Carlton dented it last week with its 2-1 win over the Lakesiders.

Much has been made of South's form slump. Much has been contributed to the club's fairytale participation in the World Cup for clubs in Brazil in January, with matches against Manchester United, Vasco De Gama and Necaxa occupying players' minds.

Although South coach Ange Postecoglou has strenuously denied any distracting influences as a result of the inaugural world bonanza, surely the thought of playing David Beckham, Ryan Giggs or Jaap Stam must be pressing against any preoccupation with meeting Sydney United tonight (Tuesday).

With only four wins, two draws and a worrying six losses behind it, South Melbourne finds itself in 10th spot on the NSL ladder.

It has made for some cause of concern. "We are going through one of those trots at the moment," Postecoglou admitted.

The big loss has been the absence of captain Paul Trimboli through injury. The striking midfield wizard and creator of many of South's attacking moves has been sorely missed in a struggling side.

Strange how a particular player can make such a difference. But it has been all too apparent that a large

amount of creativity, spontaneity and a touch of genius have been lacking from the South side.

Being 12 points (four wins) behind league leader Sydney Olympic has prompted a usually tightlipped Postecoglou to reveal, "We simply cannot afford any more dropped points. The time has come for South Melbourne to reinforce itself as a championship contender prior to our departure for Brazil."

A couple of undisciplined actions have also contributed to some forced changes.

Hungarian 'keeper Milan Ulvaracz will be struggling to regain his spot from suspension, following a spitting charge, giving Chris Jones an opportunity to cement his place under the crossbar. The 24-year-old goalkeeper is in his third season at South as second choice and having been put on the spot is bent on making the most of his chances.

At the same time, right wingback Goran Lozanovski will go to South-America after sitting on the sidelines for two weeks. He won't be playing in Australia again before the Brazil outing, following a two-match suspension as a result of some reckless behaviour during the Carlton match.

Although South's second match against Melbourne foe Carlton, scheduled for January 2, has been postponed, the club is still facing a demanding schedule upon returning from Brazil.

Two days later South will travel to Northern Spirit in a schedule that will test the squad after its taxing time in Brazil.

It is easy to dismiss South's chances of winning a record triple championship, but Postecoglou sees it differently.

"We are going through a slump, but as long as we stick together things will turn around. If we make the six, our finals record says we'll be hard to beat," he said.



NORTHERN SPIRIT

By Daniel Giorelano

If any club has so far this season failed to reach the potential that is expected of them, well then Northern Spirit fits the bill perfectly.

Fourth from bottom after 12 rounds is a position that the club is unaccustomed to.

After finishing fifth in the inaugural season last year the Spirit would have their expectations at no less than a top six berth.

The inclusion of big off season buys such as David Seal, Abbas Saad and Troy Cranney on paper made the Spirit look like a more rounded team, but unfortunately games are won on the pitch.

Since their first up 2-0 win over Sydney United at Edensor Park in Round One, Northern Spirit could only accumulate one point in their next six games, scoring only two goals in that period and conceding 11.

A win at home to the Auckland Kingz in Round eight broke a run of seven games without a win and also brought up the clubs first win at home in three games.

Their round nine away loss to Marconi looked to be the turning point in the team's slump, their dominance of the Stallions not reflected on the scoreboard.

And when the Spirit defeated the Stallions at home the next week and then the Melbourne Knights away the following week, the team looked as though they had

turned the corner.

But their last start 3-0 home loss to the previous cellar dwellers, the Adelaide Force condemned Spirit to one of their lowest points in the season so far.

Their die hard support at North Sydney Oval has diminished and following their demolishing at the hands of Adelaide, their loyal fans jeered their team off the park, a rare occurrence at North Sydney Oval.

As last year, The Spirit are struggling, upfront, their current tally of nine goals, the league's second worst record behind Gippsland and bottom of the table, Sydney United.

And whilst Graham Arnold has injected himself into the team in an attempt to stabilise his young team, his commitments with the National team have meant that his devotion is torn between club and country.

As always Robbie Slater has showed his class around the park, but it has been the work of Abbas Saad over the last few weeks that has impressed.

His creativity and vision has helped the Spirit off the bottom of the ladder but his injury against the Force has

meant that once again, Arnold will have to reshuffle his team in order to cover for the loss.

But whilst the start to the season has been bleak, Northern Spirit do have the playing personnel to still challenge for a top six berth.

Their lack of consistency and the lack of a deadly striker means Spirit will have to grind out tough, hard fought victories, a trait which was the club's forte last season.



1999: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

BRISBANE STRIKERS

By Glenn Davis

Winning is a habit and as the Brisbane Strikers have discovered so too is losing.

The critics say the wheels have fallen off the former league leaders after three successive losses, but to be sitting fifth is not a bad Christmas present for coach John Kosmina and co.

If Kosmina had been asked at the start of the season if he'd be happy with a place in the top five as a Christmas bonus he'd have gratefully taken it.

That's not to say Kosmina is happy with recent events but as a coach he's more than shown his ability to develop young talent and proven he has a keen eye for picking them.

Kosmina is in only his second year with Brisbane after inheriting a side from Frank Farina, which he took to the championship honours in his first year as a coach.

But as Kosmina points out Farina inherited his championship winning side, which had been moulded over several years while he had to dig into the local Brisbane premier league to find replacements for players seeking greener pastures.

Following the key losses of Kasey Wehrman and Steve Laybutt, Kosmina switched striker Stu McLaren to the central defence and installed him captain while his key off-season buy was Paul Foster.

Foster had a point to prove after failing to make Northern Spirit's side last season and has delivered with a string of goals, which sees him head the league's leading scorers.

Kosmina's eye for talent was discovered when he brought in players of the calibre of Peter Dwyer, Peter Grierson, Wade Baldwin, David Pilic, Shane Smeltz, Brad Ditton and Greg Di Losa from the local league.

Those players have risen to the occasion and proven they are up to national league standard.

It was only natural after a lengthy 27 round winter season those players have started to become leg weary, hence the major cause of the so-called wheels falling off the Strikers.

Strikers' chairman Tony Petty was bitterly disappointed with the side's recent 2-0 defeat by Sydney Olympic and urged Kosmina to include Olyroos Jade North and Wayne Srhoj for Brisbane's match against Wollongong.

The Strikers strung together a club record nine games without defeat prior to their losing sequence and the key to their resurgence may well lay with Kosmina and his ability to re-invent the Strikers' in the New Year.

So far Kosmina has done a superb job, but it's up to the players now to overcome the mental battle ahead.



CARLTON SC

By Bert van Bedaf

The first invention of a new soccer club in Melbourne turned into farce, when the Collingwood Warriors (if ever there was a contradiction in terms) just about fell over before the season's end, now about three years ago.

It should have warned off any other enthusiast, contemplating another unholy marriage between the two codes, realising it would be doomed to failure.

It did not daunt Lou Sticca. A former Brunswick United Juventus/Melbourne Zebras committee man, Sticca took his grand vision of creating a non-aligned club, catering for all of Melbourne's soccer fans, to AFL giant Carlton.

The marriage worked for two seasons. The club struggled for support.

Financially it managed. It made the grand final in its first season. Then, after two seasons, the Aussie Rules football club had seen enough of the round ball and turned its back on the world code.

The club passed into new ownership, Sticca and sports promoters Peter Jess and Nick Bideau became its directors.

The Carlton Soccer Club survived its ownership crisis and moved on. It still is defining its own momentum, its own supporter base. It is creating its own history and has put financial management, marketing and on-field performance as its priorities in order to attract a sizeable supporter base.

Its move to Olympic Park might become a winner, but playing on Friday nights has proved to be a fizzer. There will need to be some rethinking, maybe towards a Monday night. No matter what, Olympic Park (Carlton's contracted home for the next decade) is a bugger to park any day of the week and this will always act as a disincentive to attend matches.

On-field, the Blues are in second spot, with seven wins and three draws, and looking like championship material. Even if they win a match, coach Stuart Munro (ex Falcons) is not entirely happy with the standard, as was the case against Sydney United. "That was shocking," Munro declared after trouncing United 3-1. The bar at the Blues is set at high altitude.

With a five-year contract secured in the NSL and in its third season, Carlton is looking towards consolidating a national championship and building on that to become the number one club in Melbourne.

That is why Sticca and Jess described Carlton's 2-1 win over South Melbourne last weekend as "a defining moment in the history of the club".

They may have been riding on the back of South Melbourne's supporters' fervor, but when captain Andrew Marth struck his two goals, there was a distinct roar from the Carlton crowd at the game.

Innovation has been Carlton's calling card from day one. It now wants to stage one of its other remaining three matches against South Melbourne at Melbourne's newest Colonial stadium at the Docklands, after the success of attracting a near 13,000 crowd at Bob Jane stadium last weekend.

Apart from its inexhaustible marketing drive, the Blues can also boast a formidable playing squad. There are few more determined competitors in the league than Marth, midfielder Lubo Lapsansky and the gifted striker John Markovski (who incidentally all played for the Melbourne Knights).

To this dynamic local trio has been added experienced imports David McPherson, Stuart Slater and Mike Conroy. Other newcomers Andrew Packer, David Terminello and Craig Deans also have made their significant contributions. The big loss is Simon Colosimo, whose knee reconstruction, following a crude foul by Man United striker Andy Cole during a Socceroos match last November, has set the midfielder's career back by at least a season.

Carlton is definitely shaping up as a championship contender.



SYDNEY UNITED

By Daniel Giorelando

Sydney United have so far this season suffered a fall from Sgrace, having gone from minor premiers to bottom of the table in the space of five months.

The mass exodus of last year's Grand Finalist to cross town enemies Parramatta Power left Sydney United struggling to field a side in the National Soccer League by the start of the season.

Newly appointed coach David Ratcliffe was thrown straight into the fire, a position that he still finds himself in 12 games into the season.

To be fair to Ratcliffe however, this year's United, a team who was only thrown together on the eve of the season, has gelled remarkably well and have troubled every team that they have come across this season.

And, constant speculation about the club's future in next years National Soccer League competition has also played its part in disrupting the team.

With the future of the club up in the air, United need to put in a good showing both on and off the park.

But with United winning only two of their first 12 games, a return to the heights of last year will be near impossible.

Their fortress at Edensor Park still remains one of the toughest venues for oppositions to play at, although it is more their away record which has so far been a worry.

Three losses and two draws from five games, one of the worst records away from home, second to only South Melbourne.

But with the inclusion of former Melbourne Knights premiership winning players Tommy Pondeljak and stalwart defender Velimir Kupresak, United are still a competitive unit.

But whilst the more experienced players go about their job, it is the commitment shown by the youngsters in the squad.

Eddy Bosnar, Vince Savocca and Nick Bosevski have stood up and made themselves heard.

Considering that the majority of last season's United side now play for a rival club, the fighting spirit of the club will never die and even though seeing United in the Grand Final again seemed far off, they will still be striving to get some scalps under their belt, particularly Parramatta Power.



PERTH GLORY

By Daniel Giorelando

The Perth Glory have so far this season been one of the more consistent clubs in the league, their fourth position on the ladder shows that the first 12 rounds for the Perth club have been relatively successful.

Six wins mixed with three draws has placed the Glory well up on the ladder but it is their attacking record that has made them stand out from last year's team.

Twenty six goals, the league's best return to date are the rewards from the teams adventurous and at sometimes audacious attacking raids.

Once again the Glory are lead up front by Bobby Despotovski, who has so far netted six and Ivan Ergic who has popped up to net five.

After going through the first five rounds without defeat, wins against Gippsland and Melbourne Knights, nothing less than Perth coach Bernd Stange would have expected, the Glory were well placed near the top of the ladder.

Their shock round six loss to league pace setters at the time, the Brisbane Strikers set the Glory back in

their tracks and when they went down to Parramatta Power away, the alarm bells were ringing.

But four straight wins since that loss, including impressive wins against league condenders Carlton 4-2, and league champions South Melbourne 3-1, reassured all that the Glory were still in the hunt for the finals.

Their hard fought 3-2 last start loss away to the Breakers not a favourable result, the Sandgropers could have gone equal second with a win.

This season's Perth Glory team look a more well rounded side, the inclusions of Brazilian Junior and young Olympic games squad member Kasey Wehrman from Brisbane has added more bite in midfield.

As well as Wehrman and Junior, Ivan Ergic has come in to the side and has set the team on their way, his commitment and ability to put goals away has helped the team to play one of the league's most expansive and attacking brands of football.

Make no mistake, this season's race for the finals will be the most competitive and exciting for many a year. But beware Perth Glory will be waiting to pull out the heroics which saw them only one win away from a Grand Final berth last season.



GIPPSLAND FALCONS

By Bert van Bedaf

Let's not under-estimate the resilience of the Gippsland Falcons, however modest their part in the national league may be.

Under coach Jeff Hopkins, the Falcons have adopted a vibrant style that sometimes brings them undone.

After two wins and a draw and coming close to a top six spot, the Morwell battlers came back to earth against a 10-men Marconi, losing 2-0.

With the score 1-0 down, Hopkins needed to attack the Stallions, if his team was to salvage a point. But the Sydney side struck on the counter and sealed the full points.

"We took a gamble, but it didn't work," Hopkins admitted later. But the effort did show the willingness of the Falcons to have a go and take a risk.

Against Carlton, for example, early in the season it worked and the Falcons came away from Olympic Park with a draw.

There's no doubting the team's work rate, nor the players' or coaching staff's commitment to the task. "Our players have been working very hard. I tell them as long as they continue to work hard things will turn around," Hopkins said.

The Falcons can boast a large strike force of Juan Nilo, Brian MacNicol, Igor Mandic and Peter Kakos, who was last season's top scorer with Port Melbourne in the Victorian Premier League.

A local coup was the signing of former Socceroo star defender Mehmet Durakovic, a friend and former teammate of Hopkins at Malaysia club Selangor.

The likeable defender, known as "the General", has been

keeping a tight reign at the back, despite a groin injury, while notching up 250 NSL matches.

"To play 250 NSL games is a great effort," Falcons marketing manager Barry Stevens commented. "Mehmet is an inspiration on the field. He rallies the players behind him and urges the team to get up the ladder."

It hasn't been a fantastic period for the Falcons, who had to work their way out of debt, restructure, recapture the imagination of its local support and worry about the restructuring of the national league as well.

A paltry crowd of 2,245 watched the match against the Stallions. There should have been more of them, but probably that's all the crowd the town can muster.

Falcons Park is welcoming enough and offers a generous licenced social club, but in days of harsh economic realities homespun hospitality seems to count for very little.

Gippsland is determined to fight against the threatening expulsion from the national league. The club has been rumored to be on Soccer Australia's shortlist of clubs to be omitted from the 2000/2001 season.

"We're not happy that we're being targeted as one of the clubs to go, and obviously we believe we should be one of the clubs to stay," Falcons chief executive Peter Quirk said.

"I am making the point that we need the support of the whole of the Gippsland community. When Soccer Australia sees our crowd numbers are growing, they will identify that as a sign from Gippsland that we want to keep our national league team," he said.

Regardless of what Soccer Australia may think or later decide, the club's on-field future also shows little respite. The Falcons will be forced to fly through a considerable amount of turbulence in the new year and at the end of the difficult flight the news may not be so good. Hope lives on a wing and a prayer.



1999: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

CANBERRA COSMOS

By Graham Cooke

The Canberra Cosmos began 1999 in the depths of despair, and while the problems began to ease as the months went by, the most recent results suggest it will be some time before the club lose their battlers tag.

As the year began the Cosmos were sitting at the foot of the league without a single point. Coach Rale Rasic was gone and his deputy, Tony Brennan, who had taken over in an interim capacity, had failed to make significant improvements.

The dire situation prompted chairman Ian Knop to persuade Tom Sermanni back to Canberra from J League club Hiroshima.

Sermanni, an NSL star of the early 1980s who had later coached the Canberra Metros with some success in the NSW Superleague, brought about a transformation, and the club achieved some positive results in the second half of the season.

For the new campaign the coach enticed two former Socceroos, defender Robbie Hooker and midfielder Jason Polak, to join the club, as well as young striker Daniel Watkins. With Scottish imports David Winnie and Brian Hamilton linking up a few weeks into the season, supporters began to look forward to at least a mid-table place.

But four losses on the run and 15 goals against in five games have taken away much of the early gloss, and it now seems that avoiding a fourth consecutive finish in bottom spot is the best Canberra can hope for in the New Year.

To do better, Sermanni must find a way of plugging a leaky defence, at the same time creating and converting more chances up front.

The task is an unenviable one, the more so because time may be running out. The need to keep top-class soccer in the national capital will be less compelling once the Olympic Games are over.



ADELAIDE CITY FORCE

By Allan Crisp

Perennial slowcoach Adelaide City Force astounded even their most patient fans by crawling out of the 1999/2000 season blocks at a snail's pace.

But the genuine City faithful excused the dreadful opening record of just two wins from 12 games as an apparition that would not preclude their favourite team from yet again contesting a National Soccer League finals campaign.

There was no shortage of justifiable excuses for the tardy start with the most valid reason being the incredibly high turnover of playing staff over the past two seasons of rebuilding.

City slumped to the bottom of the NSL ladder after a 2-0 loss to Sydney Olympic and stayed there for a frustrating two weeks.

Up to that staggering stage of the Force had managed just one win - a third round home success over Parramatta Power.

A Wollongong Wolves win at Hindmarsh Stadium knocked the stuffing out of City, as a section of the restless natives hid behind banners reading "Matic must go."

In typically stoic fashion, Matic, the man who had guided City to three NSL championships, dug in his heels to answer his critics.

Asked to confirm or deny an "unconfirmed" radio report that he had resigned, Matic replied, "Have you ever known me to quit?"

"I am always committed, I am never one that gives in, don't worry about that. This is a big challenge, it's huge ... pride is number one and if you don't have pride you can't do any job."

Matic stayed, but City's Chief Executive Officer Ned Coten resigned to resume in the basketball world with the Victoria Titans.

Coten cited the club's resistance to change as the major reason for his departure.

A membership backlash to embrace his plans to appeal to the mainstream sporting audience had broken his desire.

Meanwhile, City fired by a Damian Mori hat-trick, got back on the winning list with a 3-0 win over Northern Spirit, renewing Adelaide's Christmas spirit and setting the stage for an improbable, but not impossible City revival.



AUCKLAND KINGZ

By Daniel Giorelano

The Auckland Kingz have stormed into the National Soccer League this season with one goal in mind, to make the playoffs.

So far this season, the leagues new boys have showed that they are a team not to be taken lightly.

Their shock 3-0 away win at Marconi in round 11 and their maiden victory on Australian soil against league leaders, Sydney Olympic back in round six confirmed that the Kingz were able to mix it with the league's best.

Their away record of three wins and a draw from six games, is one of the best in the league.

But surprisingly it is the Kingz' poor home record which is a worry for Player/manager Wynton Rufer. One win from six games at home is the league's worst record, their only victory coming in round three against South Melbourne, the club's maiden victory in the league.

Auckland's inability to make their home ground at North Harbour Stadium a fortress for visiting sides may be the difference to whether the new boys make it to the finals.

The Kingz must also be disappointed by the lack of Crowd support for the team at home. An average gate of less than 5,000 a far cry from the pre-season prediction of 15,000 per game.

With the leagues fourth best attacking record, 22 goals in 12 games, Auckland do not have a problem putting the ball in the back of the net.

Their problem lies however at the other end, 23 goals conceded, is the league's worst defensive record, equal only to the Melbourne Knights.

Player/manager Wynton Rufer has been one of the club's best, his experience and vision a delight to watch, his involvement a key in the Kingz's fight for a top six berth.

As well as Rufer, sweeper Levent Osman and midfielders Robbie Middleby and Dino Mennillo have stood out the club's best in the team's first three months of competition.

Going into round 13, The Kingz found themselves sitting four points out of the top six in eighth spot, ahead of clubs of the calibre of league champions South Melbourne and Parramatta Power.

Auckland however are a force in the league and should they improve their home record, a spot in the top six beckons.



WOLLONGONG WOLVES

By Otto Bader

After the previous season's narrow miss coach Nick Theodorakopoulos and his club directors did realise something had to be done to add a little bit of class to the side.

Since Nick came to Wollongong on recommendation of entrepreneur Harry Michaels the team has been remodelled, playing now an entertaining style of soccer, much enjoyed by the fans.

Early this season classy defender David Cervinski joined the Wolves plus former English professional Stuart Young. Together with the remaining regulars which included several local boys like Scott Chipperfield, Matt Horsley, Paul Reid, Daniel Beltrame, Paul Dimech, Sasho Dimovski Chad Bishop, a solid side developed. Some players left since they could not see a permanent spot in the team.

Luckily the frame work of the side stayed together and now long time injured class defender Alvin Ceccoli is fit again.

A business group took the club over with about 20 business people each investing around \$50,000 each plus more than 60 corporate sponsors, providing much needed funds and stability. A general manager was appointed in Graeme Haney, assisted by several office staff personnel.

At the beginning of the season the Wolves hoped for a solid mid-table place, aiming in years to come for higher honours.

While it is early days, the signs are looking good. Providing injuries to key players, suspensions or outside influences don't occur, the Wolves should be looking to a play-off position.

This would bring in the crowd like last year against Adelaide City when over 10,000 turned up at Brandon Park.

A dampner over the club are the rumours that the league might axe certain clubs and all of a sudden considers Wollongong as a Sydney club which could well go.

Coach Nick Theodorakopoulos is a young man ambitious to advance his coaching career and will work his players hard to achieve top results.

Some of the players are confident that they can win the league and that is always a good indication. The club has potential and will grow given a chance. With success the crowds will flock even more so to the games.



PARRAMATTA POWER

By John Economos

The Parramatta Power, the League's fledgling team, has not had the best of starts with the big boys.

After 12 rounds the Power has managed to win one match in every three, with three draws.

Pre season preparation has not been the best for the Power as they had to train at grounds without goals.

This made things a bit more difficult for the squad, especially the strikers Mile Sterjovski, Jon Angelucci and Joel Griffiths.

"We've had our share of problems in the first third of the competition," stated coach David Mitchell.

"We've been plagued by injuries, and being a brand new side it is taking a bit longer for all the lads to gel together.

"Even though most have played together with United last season, a lot of the players just assumed that it will all just happen again for us at Parramatta.



"Not so.

"I would have liked a much better start, as this season, the League is very even and anybody down the bottom can really beat anybody at the top.

"We are hopeful for a Top Six spot at the end of the season, but it is going to be very hard work all the way, even though we have the staff to do it.

"Over these holiday breaks we have to pick up points in all our games. That is a must.

"I have said it before that I fancy Sydney Olympic to win the minor League championship as they have a very strong squad with a good defence plus a strong attack led by Pablo Cardozo," ended Mitchell.

Easily the Power's most consistent player has been their lanky goalkeeper Andrew Crews.

Crews has had many outstanding performances and on more than one occasion has saved the Power, turning defeat into a win.

MARCONI STALLIONS

By John Economos

Marconi who after 12 rounds are barely mclinging to sixth spot on the League ladder, face two tough games this week, the first against the Perth Glory tonight (Tuesday) in Perth and against the Melbourne Knights on Sunday at the Marconi Stadium.

Marconi must salvage something from both of these games to avoid the danger of falling well adrift from the Top Six.

Having lost just four of their matches, Marconi has the capacity to get on a roll and pressure the leaders.

Coach Eddie Krncevic stated to ABSW: "Since coming to Marconi, I've changed a few things around and have increased the tempo.

"The boys have adapted well under the intensity and they have responded by showing me a real professional attitude.

"I believe that we still have not hit our peak as yet.



"We are largely still playing well though.

"We are ridding ourselves of some bad habits (like against the Kingz).

"The players have now realised that just pure talent is just not enough.

"Some players believed at first that just by being with a big club such as Marconi, was all there was to it. Of course that is not so.

"Marconi does have the talent to go far and we hope to finish well and convincingly.

"I must say that a lot could depend on how efficiently our referees perform.

"This season Marconi has had many dubious decisions made against us.

"All we are asking for is some consistency from them (referees)."

But Krncevic was enthused by all of the younger members of his squad.

"Michael Turnbull, Chad Gibson, Buddy Farah and Christian Care have done very well to date.

Last week Krncevic signed up Kevo Gulesserian, an exciting 17-year-old graduate from the A.I.S.

LEIGHARDT TIGERS



NSW SUPER LEAGUE SEASON LAUNCH



Leighardt Tigers Senior Coach Les De Celis (centre) pictured with club CEO Angelo Riccio (left) and former Australian World Cup captain Johnny Warren.



Les De Celis and his lovely wife Linda.



Tigers President Tony Raciti (left) with Peter Gray, President of the NSW Soccer Federation.

**LEIGHARDT TIGERS SOCCER CLUB
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Coach De Celis (with microphone) introduces the player roster for season 2000.

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The Millennium's last NSL season is underway

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Postecoglou says his team deserves better

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MARCONI POSTER

SOUTH DENY PLAYER UNREST

DO OR DIE FOR POWER

By John Rossiter

DO OR DIE FOR POWER: A new era of football is dawning in Australia. The game is becoming more professional, more competitive, and more exciting. The players are becoming more skilled, more powerful, and more determined. The fans are becoming more passionate, more loyal, and more vocal. The game is becoming more than just a sport. It is becoming a way of life.

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BRILLIANT BOSNICH

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

By John Rossiter

BRILLIANT BOSNICH: A new era of football is dawning in Australia. The game is becoming more professional, more competitive, and more exciting. The players are becoming more skilled, more powerful, and more determined. The fans are becoming more passionate, more loyal, and more vocal. The game is becoming more than just a sport. It is becoming a way of life.

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A TOUCH OF RUSH

By John Rossiter

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KOSMINA CRACKS RECORD

SO CLOSE

By John Rossiter

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ROCKY OR EDDIE?

By John Rossiter

ROCKY OR EDDIE?: A new era of football is dawning in Australia. The game is becoming more professional, more competitive, and more exciting. The players are becoming more skilled, more powerful, and more determined. The fans are becoming more passionate, more loyal, and more vocal. The game is becoming more than just a sport. It is becoming a way of life.

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VELA'S RECORD

By John Rossiter

VELA'S RECORD: A new era of football is dawning in Australia. The game is becoming more professional, more competitive, and more exciting. The players are becoming more skilled, more powerful, and more determined. The fans are becoming more passionate, more loyal, and more vocal. The game is becoming more than just a sport. It is becoming a way of life.

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WILL IT BE 12?

By John Rossiter

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WILL IT BE 12?: A new era of football is dawning in Australia. The game is becoming more professional, more competitive, and more exciting. The players are becoming more skilled, more powerful, and more determined. The fans are becoming more passionate, more loyal, and more vocal. The game is becoming more than just a sport. It is becoming a way of life.

AS 1999 DRAWS TO A CLOSE WE
LOOK BACK AT SOME OF THE
MAJOR **ABSW**
HEADLINES OF 1999.
WE WISH YOU WELL AND LOOK
FORWARD TO MORE HEADLINES
IN 2000.

National Youth League

NORTHERN DIVISION (ROUND 13)

TUESDAY 28 DECEMBER 1999

Wollongong Wolves Colts v NSWIS
(Brandon Park No. 2 — 4.00pm)

Marconi Stallions Colts v Newcastle Breakers
(Marconi Stadium — 4.00pm)

Sydney United v Newcastle Breakers Colts
(Sydney United Sports Centre — 4.00pm)

QAS v Wollongong Wolves
(Suncorp Metway Stadium — 4.45pm)

ACTAS v Northern Spirit
(Bruce Stadium — 5.00pm)

Parramatta Power v Sydney Olympic
(Parramatta Stadium — 5.30pm)

Northern Spirit Colts v Sydney United Colts
(Christie Park — 6.30pm)

Sydney Olympic Academy v AIS
(Played on Sunday 5 December 1999)
Bye — Marconi Stadium

LEADING SCORERS

Elias Demourtzidis	A.I.S.	11
Russell Miner	Q.A.S.	9
Damian Pisano	Sydney Olympic	7
Franco Parisi	Sydney Olympic Academy	7
Grant Last	A.I.S.	6
Daniel Kukucka	Parramatta Power	6

SOUTHERN DIVISION (ROUND 10)



Petrit Emini of South Dandenong makes a last ditch clearance from Jovanco Novacevski (9) and Andrew Mashoian (10) of South Melbourne.



Petrit Emini (left), Viktor Memeti (7, centre) and Laurent Honore of South Melbourne (right) in a tangle over the ball.

*All photos taken
by Roy Hay*

LEADING SCORERS

Anthony Pelikan	Melbourne Knights	10
Andrew Mashoian	South Melbourne	9
Ace Stojcevski	Carlton	7
David Martin	Albury Wodonga	7
Angelo Motosopoulos	Carlton	6
Deniz Ekici	Carlton	6
Naum Sekulovski	VIS	6
Xhezair Sulemani	Bulleen Inter	5
Josip Loncaric	VIS	5
Mark Tsiorlas	VIS	5



Richie Alagich of South Melbourne clears from Festim Zekiri of South Dandenong.

WEDNESDAY 12 JANUARY 2000

Fawkner Blues v South Melbourne
(CB Smith Reserve, 6.30pm)

SATURDAY 15 JANUARY 2000

Gippsland Falcons v Preston Lions
(Falcons Stadium, 4pm)

VIS v South Dandenong
(Grange Reserve, 4pm)

SUNDAY 16 JANUARY 2000

Melbourne Knights v Melbourne Knights Academy
(Knights Stadium, 3.30pm)

Bulleen Inter v Carlton
(Mahoneys Reserve, 4pm)

Albury Wodonga v Bye

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THE 1999/2000

JUNIOR SOCCER

CLEAR VISION FOR ANDREW

By Daniel Gioirolando

Andrew James Durante has a vision, that vision is to make a name in the National league and then as many of our juniors do, travel overseas and play in the world's top leagues.

But for a split moment late in July, that dream was almost shattered by an irresponsible moment of madness that unfortunately young Durante was caught up in.

Whilst in the middle of pre-season trials for Sydney Olympic at Marrickville's Mahoney Park, Durante was shot in the chest by a .22 calibre rifle, the bullet lodging itself under his armpit.

"I felt something hit me in the chest, I felt 90 percent of shock mixed with 10 percent of pain," recalls Durante.

"I looked down and saw blood pouring out of my left nipple. At first people thought it was a pellet gun but in fact I was hit by a .22 calibre rifle shot from about 400 metres away.

It was a random shooting, and I was unlucky to get hit but it hasn't changed my life dramatically although I suppose I'm a bit more cautious now."

Understandably the shock and trauma that both his family and his friends went through in the next few minutes are unexplainable.

But the determination of the young stopper is so that only a week after being shot, he represented the NSW schoolboys team in Canberra.

Currently playing for Sydney Olympic reserves, Durante is hoping that he can break into the top grade in the next two years and then take it from there.

"In the next few years I hope to get a first grade contract, make a name for myself and then get a contract overseas."

And Andrew's performance for the club have seen him climb the ladder from the U/15's to the Colts and now to the Reserves.

And it was with the Olympic Colts side that Durante earned the respect of his peers, rewarded for his constant effort with the player of the year award.

Starting out since he was five, Durante has always strived to play the best he can. His most memorable achievement on the park coming whilst playing in the U14 state titles.



Andrew Durante: Big future.

"It is my most memorable game because we wrapped up the treble, Minor Premiership, Premiership and then state champions."

Durante's commitment to his current club Olympic, is clearly evident, his decision to decline an invitation to tour with the prestigious Australian Schoolboys team of England a decision that Andrew feels was the right thing to do.

"If I was to go on tour with the Schoolboys, I would have lost my spot in the team which would have made it hard for me to regain it back once I returned."

Apart from his playing goals, Durante hopes to one day start up his own building company. But first he must do the hard yards in class, his preparations for TAFE next season already in full flight.

But his plans of owning his own business will surely be put on hold as he chases footballing glory, his path to stardom assisted along the way by former U/15 state coach Kelly Cross and idol Paolo

Maldini.

"I admire my former U/15 coach Kelly Cross as well as Maldini. He is the best player in the world. He is solid at the back and is good to watch."

But before getting to the dizzy heights that Italian National captain Maldini has reached, Durante must first break into the National league.

His performances for Olympic Reserves this season have been solid at the back, the team currently sitting third behind Parramatta Power and the AIS, and his performances are certain to catch the eye of first grade coach Branko Culina in the near future.

And one day when Andrew does hit the big time, he will look back at that unforgettable day in late July as the turning point of his career and certainly the luckiest day of his life.

PROFILE

Full Name: Andrew James Durante
DOB: 3/5/82
Foot: Right
Eye Colour: Brown
Hair Colour: Brown/Blond
Positions Played: Stopper/ Central defender
Previous Clubs: Eastern Suburbs/Sydney Olympic



Andrew Durante: In action.



Paolo Maldini: Best player in the world.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Player of the year for Sydney Olympic Colts 1998
Making the U/15 NSW squad
Selected in 1999 Australian Schoolboys squad

Major Ambition: To play overseas in either England or Italy

PERSONALITY

Favourite Actor: Adam Sandler
Favourite Comedian: Jimeon
Favourite Magazine: ABSW
Favourite Food: Chicken Schnitzel
Favourite Drink: Fanta
Favourite TV Show: Simpsons

If you were stuck on a deserted Island with five people, who would you want to be with?

Cindy Crawford
Elle McPherson
Paolo Maldini
Alicia Silverstone
Uma Thurman

THE PEERS

Favourite Overseas player: Paolo Maldini
Favourite Overseas team: Juventus
Most Admired Australian (Based overseas): Paul Okon
Most Admired Defender: Paolo Maldini
Most Admired Midfielder: Juan Veron
Most Admired Striker: Michael Owen
Most Admired Goalkeeper: Mark Bosnich
Major influences: Family and past coaches



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AUSTRALIAN AND BRITISH SOCCER WEEKLY, PO BOX 155,
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OR E-MAIL PHOTOS IN JPEG FORMAT TO
soccerweekly@hotmail.com

*All photos will be returned

FAMOUS PHOTOS

Have you had your photo taken with someone famous in soccer? Even if it happened years ago, you can have the photo published in ABSW. Send photos to

The Editor

**Australian and British Soccer Weekly
P.O. Box 155, Marrickville NSW 2204.**

Or E-mail the photo in JPEG format to
soccerweekly@hotmail.com.

**All photos will be returned*

STUMP THE EDITOR

QUESTION from:

**Sam Bilotti
Carlton, VIC**

On May 6 1949 a plane carrying the entire Torino football team crashed. How many members of the Italian National team were killed?

Sam, ten members of the Italian team were killed. They included Aldo Ballarin and the National Captain Valentino Mazzola. The Torino team had been on the verge of their fourth straight Italian title.

QUESTION from:

**Michael Kmet
Newcastle, NSW**

In 1995 at the Australian University games in Darwin, Newcastle University played Sydney University in their pool match. What was the scoreline of this match? Who went on to win the games and what was the score in the final?

Newcastle beat a very young Sydney University side 4-0 in their pool match. Newcastle went on to take the gold medal beating the University of Melbourne 3-1 in the final.

THE RULES

Due to some questions being received on the day of or the day before we go to print, all questions will be answered within two editions of ABSW. If the question is not answered within two editions, then I am stumped.

Important

It is important that all questions are genuine, not silly and worded so they are not ambiguous. Questions that are deliberately misleading will not be answered until worded simply.

THIS WEEKS

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or fax on (02) 9550 9332

or email to:

soccerweekly@hotmail.com

SOCCER WOMAN

By Janene Mar

WORLD CHAMPS BOYCOTT AUSTRALIA CUP

The US Soccer Federation last Thursday (Australian time) confirmed the entire World Cup winning roster has refused to participate in the second Australia Cup after negotiations over player payments had broken down.

The top 20 players in the country have been out of contract since the World Cup ended in July this year.

General Manager of the US Women's National Team, Mr Brian Fleming, said, "Our USA '99 roster has been aware that contracts could not be finalised until after the appointment of the new National Coach at the end of January 2000."

"We offered the players the same terms for the Australia Cup tour (under the old contract) and offered to pay any additional benefits retroactively that may be negotiated in the new contract," he added.

Fleming said, "We have basically put all our eggs in the one basket in the last seven years to the point that we have an amazingly experienced group of 16 to 20



Mia Hamm: The American star boycotting the Australia Cup.

A CASE OF GREED?

The cruellest of blows has been dealt upon the sport here in Australia, the Australia Cup losing its main drawcard (apart from the Matildas, that is) at the eleventh hour. Thanks for the Christmas goodwill, America - Not.

The Cup was shifted from the original December dates to early January, solely to accommodate the USA after they had advised organisers they were no longer available until the new year. After the whirlwind success of this year's World Cup, private promoters swooped in, dangled the money carrot and swiftly put into place the three-month 12-city indoor Victory Tour, outside the sanctioning of US Soccer. Despite early January being a logistical nightmare, AWSA agreed on the shift to ensure the big name players would once again grace our shores. And now this.

But is this a case of big money and greed working to the detriment of our sport? Without knowing details of the terms being sought by the World Champion players, we can't condemn them completely.

But it still appears from where I'm standing that greed is clouding the issue. No player, or group of players in this case, is bigger than the sport. Of course,

the players are of the greatest importance and their interests and welfare are of the highest priority. Their input into the sport should be encouraged, but athletes should not be dictating the direction of the sport. The National Team is but one facet of a sport, albeit a very significant one, but not the only group to be considered.

The World Cup players have already each received a large sum (six-figure) of money as reward for their historic victory. This was then doubled by the Victory Tour promoters. The brave-revealing Brandi Chastain has reportedly since secured a million dollars worth of endorsements for herself. And good luck to them for achieving such status as female team athletes.

What ever happened to the love of sport simply for the enjoyment and the passion? It's true that sport in general has become big business, but the true values of sport should never be forgotten. All this seems a most unfortunate side to such a groundbreaking Women's World Cup.

The focus on one's own financial gains can only harm women's football. Dollar signs get in the way of real values, of remembering what's really important. Of giving back to the sport

and the community, of providing good role models to the young, of reaching for even higher goals through sheer hard work and constant improvement, of showing true grit and heart in the most difficult of situations. Pride and passion in representing one's country must remain the number one motivation.

There are plenty of other talented athletes who would die to be in their position. Especially in a nation of over seven million female soccer players. No-one's forcing them to be there.

It could well be that the champs are forcing themselves out of the game anyway. The sport won't be held to ransom.

If the World Cup players remain at loggerheads over this contract issue, then perhaps the US players we are about to see perform in the Australia Cup are now the number one team, and we will be first to witness their development. Let's see what wonderful talent is lying quietly just beneath that top layer of cream just waiting to get out. These will be the next new stars. And at least their heart will be in it.

So don't desert what will still be some exciting football. Make sure you still come out and support the Australia Cup.

Fleming observed, "The three year gap between Sydney 2000 and the next World Cup would have given us time to review the first team roster immediately after the Olympic Games. With a year less to prepare we are now looking to make some significant changes to the roster before the Olympics."

Chief Executive of Australian Women's Soccer, Mr Warren Fisher, said, "There is little point pretending the USA team coming to the Australia Cup is as good as the one that is staying at home."

"But given the recent quarrels of Baseball and Basketball in the United States, the team we see in January may well end up being the same team we see in September," he added.

"It seems surprising the World Cup players did not accept an offer that included retrospective payments that may arise from the new agreement."

Clearly the players were trying to force US Soccer's hand before the appointment of the new National Coach."

"While we seem to be at the end of a long queue involving the FIFA All Stars, Manchester United and Brazil, I think the circumstances here are quite different."

"I come back to the point that the 18 players coming to Australia in two weeks have suddenly become the best players in the most successful women's soccer nation on earth."

"If we are not going to see the likes of Hamm, Chastain and Foudy representing USA again, I am sure this series will be watched with great interest by the other seven teams who have qualified for Sydney 2000."

players."

"If this group can't come to terms with US Soccer we will simply have to revert to the next roster of top players - the ones you will see in the Australia Cup. I think this has been a bad move by some of our veterans who may have just ended their careers."

The recent announcement by FIFA to bring the 4th FIFA Women's World Cup forward from 2003 to 2002 has increased pressure on US Soccer to blood new players at the highest level.



World Champions USA: A new breed to grace our shores.

SERIE A: THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

By Joe Russo

After 14 Rounds of the Serie A, it is an opportune time to look back on the season so far.

The off-season was full of news with the Christian Vieri transfer from Lazio to Inter and so far he has produced seven goals - mind you, an injury spell certainly hasn't helped.

Fiorentina is one of the disappointments of the season so far. High expectations at the start of the season with acquisitions, that included Di Livio (Juventus), Mijatovic (Real Madrid) and Balbo (Parma), have so far proved fairly fruitless.

At one stage their legendary coach Giovanni Trapattoni handed in his resignation but the club President Vittorio Cecchi Gori refused to accept it.

The irony of Fiorentina's plight is, that they are doing so well in the Champions League - remember their victory over Manchester United?

Lazio sit pretty at the top of the table but we have seen that before. Their last

Championship dates back to 1974 and only last year they literally threw away the title at the last minute to AC Milan.

Juventus is at the top and that is exactly what the fans of the 'Old Lady' expect. It seems that Alex Del Piero is back to his best and given his injuries over recent years, it certainly is a welcome sight in the black and white stripes.

Roma, with former AC Milan and Real Madrid mentor Fabio Capello at the helm, is doing fairly well despite recent losses.

Capello has four Italian and one Spanish Championship to his curriculum and Roma's squad, that includes Totti, Delvecchio, Candela and Di Francesco, is certainly in good hands.

Parma is as usual near the top of the ladder, however, they are still to win a Championship and once again it is unlikely that this will be their year.

AC Milan and their city rivals Inter are both just off the pace and this really isn't good enough for either side.

AC Milan has players such as Shevchenko, Boban, Bierhoff, Leonardo, Costacurta and Maldini in their squad and they are the defending champions.



Roma players celebrate. Under coach Fabio Capello they are the surprise package of the season so far.

Fans of the legendary 'rossoneri' may be a little disappointed on the whole with their team, especially given its disastrous exit from both European Cup competitions.

Inter on the other hand has been plagued by injury. Ronaldo and Vieri are yet to play together for any length of time and now the former is out of action for at least a couple of months.



The minnows Bari and Perugia sit comfortably in mid table — their respective veteran coaches Fascetti and Mazzone are indeed 'old foxes' of the Serie A.

And finally, a word on Reggina. The smallest club in the Serie A is competing for the first time in its 75 year history with the big boys.

Despite early season form and a recent draw at the mighty San Siro Stadium against AC Milan, it is unlikely that they will survive and the drop down at the end of the season seems a certainty.

Many of their loyal fans and soccer supporters in general, will be hoping that they can defy the odds.

To all of you, it is a Happy New Year and best wishes for 2000.



Christian Vieri: Record off-season move to Inter.



Edgar Davids of Juventus tangles with Lazio's Alessandro Nesta. Both sides finished 1999 at the top.

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE



GROUP A

Porto (Portugal)
Hertha Berlin (Germany)
Barcelona (Spain)
Sparta Prague (Czech Republic)

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 23

Hertha Berlin 1 Barcelona 1
Michalke 33 Luis Enrique 14
Sparta Prague 0 Porto 2
Drulovic 77, Jardel 84

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8

Porto 1 Hertha Berlin 0
Drulovic 78
Barcelona 5 Sparta Prague 0
Kluivert 44, 63
Luis Enrique 45, 76
Guardiola 59

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1

Barcelona v Porto
Hertha Berlin v Sparta Prague

TUESDAY, MARCH 7

Porto v Barcelona
Sparta Prague v Hertha Berlin

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15

Barcelona v Hertha Berlin
Porto v Sparta Prague

TUESDAY, MARCH 21

Hertha Berlin v Porto
Sparta Prague v Barcelona

	Table
Porto	2 2 0 0 3 0 6
Barcelona	2 1 1 0 6 1 4
Hertha Berlin	2 0 1 1 1 2 1
Sparta Prague	2 0 0 2 0 7 0

GROUP B

Bordeaux (France)
Fiorentina (Italy)
Manchester United (England)
Valencia (Spain)

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 23

Fiorentina 2 Manchester Utd 0
Batistuta 25, Balbo 52
Valencia 3 Bordeaux 0
Farinos 60, Ilie 66,
Gonzalez 88

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8

Bordeaux 0 Fiorentina 0
Manchester Utd 3 Valencia 0
Keane 38, Solskjaer 47
Scholes 69

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1

Manchester Utd v Bordeaux
Fiorentina v Valencia

TUESDAY, MARCH 7

Bordeaux v Manchester Utd
Valencia v Fiorentina

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15

Manchester Utd v Fiorentina
Bordeaux v Valencia

TUESDAY, MARCH 21

Fiorentina v Bordeaux
Valencia v Manchester Utd

	Table
Fiorentina	2 1 1 0 2 0 4
Manchester Utd	2 1 0 1 3 2 3
Valencia	2 1 0 1 3 3 3
Bordeaux	2 0 1 1 0 3 1

GROUP C

Bayern Munich (Germany)
Dynamo Kiev (Ukraine)
Real Madrid (Spain)
Rosenborg Trondheim (Norway)

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24

Dynamo Kiev 1 Real Madrid 2
Rebrov 85pen Morientes 17, Raul 48
Rosenborg 1 Bayern Munich 1
Skammelsrud 47 Jancker 10

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 7

Bayern Munich 2 Dynamo Kiev 1
Jancker 6, Sergio 80 Rebrov 50
Real Madrid 3 Rosenborg 1
Raul 17, Savio 85 Carew 47
Carlos 90

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 29

Real Madrid v Bayern Munich
Dynamo Kiev v Rosenborg

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8

Bayern Munich v Real Madrid
Rosenborg v Dynamo Kiev

TUESDAY, MARCH 14

Real Madrid v Dynamo Kiev
Bayern Munich v Rosenborg

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22

Dynamo Kiev v Bayern Munich
Rosenborg v Real Madrid

	Table
Real Madrid	2 2 0 0 5 2 6
Bayern Munich	2 1 1 0 3 2 4
Rosenborg	2 0 1 1 2 4 1
Dynamo Kiev	2 0 0 2 2 4 0

GROUP D

Feyenoord (Netherlands)
Olympique Marseille (France)
Lazio (Italy)
Chelsea (England)

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24

Marseille 0 Lazio 2
Stankovic 64,
Conceicao 78
Chelsea 3 Feyenoord 1
Babayaro 45 Julio Cruz 90
Tore Flo 67, 86

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 7

Feyenoord 3 Marseille 0
Cruz 72, 90
Bosvelt 83
Lazio 0 Chelsea 0

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 29

Lazio v Feyenoord
Marseille v Chelsea

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8

Feyenoord v Lazio
Chelsea v Marseille

TUESDAY, MARCH 14

Lazio v Marseille
Feyenoord v Chelsea

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22

Marseille v Feyenoord
Chelsea v Lazio

	Table
Chelsea	2 1 1 0 3 1 4
Lazio	2 1 1 0 2 0 4
Feyenoord	2 1 0 1 4 3 3
Marseille	2 0 0 2 0 5 0

LAZIO IN RECORD BID FOR RIVALDO

Lazio are prepared to pay a world record 120 billion lire (\$62.57 million) to bring Barcelona's European footballer of the year Rivaldo to Rome.

The paper said Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti had been trying for two weeks to reach an agreement with the Brazilian, who has

been dropped from the Barcelona first team after a row with coach Louis van Gaal.

He said that if Lazio completed the deal, they would sell Chilean striker Marcelo Salas to Juventus for around 50 billion lire (\$26.07 million) to help meet the cost.

The current world record transfer fee is \$49.5 million, paid by Inter

Milan to buy Italian striker Christian Vieri from Lazio in June.

**RIVALDO:
EUROPEAN PLAYER
OF THE YEAR
Page 26**



Rivaldo: Subject of a world record bid.

QUARTER FINALS

FIRST LEG — April 5
SECOND LEG — April 19

SEMI-FINALS

FIRST LEG — May 3
SECOND LEG — May 10

FINAL

Wednesday, May 24
At Stade de France

FIFA World Rankings

(Valid until January 22)

1	Brazil	69	Honduras	137	St Kitts & Nevis
2	Czech Republic	70	Estonia	138	Panama
3	France	71=	Burkina Faso	139	Tahiti
4	Spain	71=	Mali	140	Benin
5	Germany	73	Guatemala	141	St Vincent/Gr
6	Argentina	74	Gabon	142	Ethiopia
7	Norway	75	Bosnia-Herz.	143	Maldives
8	Romania	76	Nigeria	144	Solomon Islands
9	Croatia	77=	Cuba	145=	Andorra
10	Mexico	77=	Iraq	145=	Rwanda
11	Denmark	79	Senegal	147=	Antigua & Barbuda
12	England	80	Namibia	147=	Cayman Islands
13	Yugoslavia	81	Canada	149=	Dominica
14	Italy	82	Kuwait	149=	San Marino
15	Portugal	83	Albania	151=	Gambia
16	Sweden	84	Northern Ireland	151=	Saint Lucia
17	Paraguay	85	Armenia	153	Sri Lanka
18	Russia	86	Algeria	154	Lesotho
19	Netherlands	87	Togo	155	Dominican Rep.
20	Scotland	88	China PR	156	Laos
21	Slovakia	89	AUSTRALIA	157	Nepal
22	United States	89	Indonesia	158	Yemen
23	Chile	91	Guinea	159	Kyrgyzstan
24	Morocco	92	Oman	160	Mauritania
25	Colombia	93	Moldova	161	British Virgin Is.
26	Israel	94	Congo	162	Surinam
26	Ukraine	95=	Belarus	163=	Bermuda
28	Austria	95=	El Salvador	163=	Niger
29	Turkey	97	Azerbaijan	165	Botswana
30	South Africa	98	Wales	166	Chad
31	Tunisia	99	Haiti	167	Neth. Antilles
32	Poland	100	New Zealand	168=	Cambodia
33	Belgium	101	Mozambique	168=	Eritrea
34	Greece	102	Vietnam	170	Palestine
35	Republic of Ireland	103	Kenya	171	Guyana
36	Zambia	104	Singapore	172	Korea DPR
37	Bulgaria	105	Liberia	173	Guinea-Bissau
38	Egypt	106	India	174	Chinese Taipei
38	Saudi Arabia	107	Qatar	175	C African Rep.
40	Slovenia	108	Uganda	176	Macao
41	Jamaica	109	Syria	177=	Cape Verde Is.
42	Peru	110	Venezuela	177=	Tonga
43	Iceland	111	Lebanon	179=	Pakistan
43	Trinidad & Tobago	112	Faroe Islands	179=	Samoa
45	Hungary	113	Barbados	181	Philippines
45	Uruguay	114	Malawi	182	Cook Islands
47	Switzerland	115	Jordan	183	PNG
48	Ghana	116	Malta	184	Vanuatu
48	Iran	117	Malaysia	185	Brunei Darussalam
50	Lithuania	118	Mauritius	186	Puerto Rico
51	Korea Republic	119	Tajikistan	187	Sao Tome e Principe
52	Angola	120	Sierra Leone	188	Equatorial Guinea
53	Cote d'Ivoire	121	Grenada	189	Bahamas
53	UAE Emirates	122	Hong Kong	190	Belize
55	Uzbekistan	123=	Kazakhstan	191	Aruba
56	Finland	123=	Luxembourg	192	Seychelles
57	Japan	125	Liechtenstein	193	Nicaragua
58	Cameroon	126	Myanmar	194	US Virgin Islands
59	Congo DR (Zaire)	127=	Swaziland	195	Djibouti
60	Thailand	127=	Tanzania	196	Turks & Caicos Islands
61	Bolivia	129	Turkmenistan	197	Somalia
62	Latvia	130=	Bangladesh	198	Mongolia
63	Cyprus	130=	Libya	198	American Samoa
64	Costa Rica	132	Sudan	200=	Guam
65	Ecuador	133	Burundi	200=	Montserrat
66	Georgia	134	Madagascar	202	Anguilla
67	Zimbabwe	135	Fiji		
68	FYR Macedonia	136	Bahrain		

Note: Teams inactive since 1991 and teams which have not played yet do not appear in the table.

PETIT PROBLEM AT ARSENAL

Emmanuel Petit shuffled out of the Arsenal dressing room after an extraordinary UEFA Cup-tie in France to deliver a tirade that has put his future in English football in doubt.

After Arsenal had reached the last 16 by drawing 3-3 with Nantes to go through 6-3 on aggregate the French midfielder launched an astonishing attack on all and sundry.

Petit, who last season threatened to quit Highbury because of disciplinary problems, said: 'I ask myself about my future plans at Highbury every day. I have three and a half years left on my contract but that means little nowadays.'

Perhaps he had been angered by what he believed was an unwarranted intrusion into his private life by the English media, people he called 'dung-beetles'.

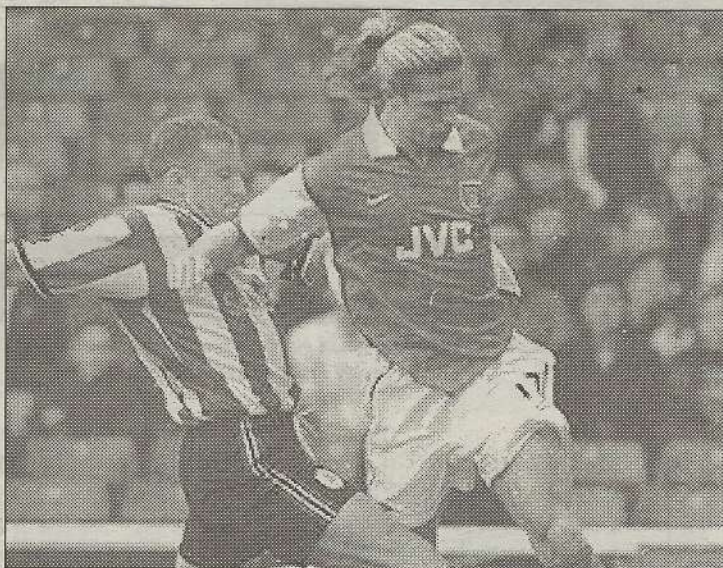
He also isn't happy about Christmas football. 'In England I have to spend Christmas in a hotel as I have to play a match the next day. When I was a kid it was my favourite time of the year.'

When it was pointed out this was a tradition in England he retorted: 'You know what they used to do in Berlin? They used to kick a football against a wall. Then they realised there was something else over the wall. Things change in time.'

Then he claimed there was an anti-French campaign in England. He was particularly angry at the six-match ban and £45,000 fine imposed on his teammate Patrick Vieira for spitting at Neil Ruddock in the clash against West Ham.

He said: 'Football nowadays seems to be all about giving a good kicking to Vieira, myself or any other well-known French player to wind him up. There is a simpleminded anti-French bias and there are a lot of matters I will no longer be able to put up with in the future.'

Which led him on to another attack,



Emmanuel Petit: Future in doubt.

where he suggested that decisions are being made and ideas discussed by the world football authorities without any consultation with the players.



'That cannot be right,' he said. 'You know what they are talking about? A World Cup every two years. They can't be serious about that. It will mean players having to finish younger and younger. It will not be possible for them to carry on to the same age as now.'

And he wasn't overjoyed at the number of games he is having to play in England. 'We play matches every three days and I keep on saying it's a monumental mistake,' said Petit. 'The players will rise up and say they are

sick and tired of it.'

At least, the knee that troubled him for so long is holding up to the rigours that are customary in England.

'I still wear a bandage but that is more psychological than anything,' he explained. 'I feel I need to have protection and that is the same with many players who go out with strappings.'

If Petit was unhappy with life in general he must have been pleased with the result. A youthful and enthusiastic Nantes team took the lead after 13 minutes through Antoine Sibierski.

But Gilles Grimandi equalised in the 25th minute and, as a contest, the tie was over by half-time after Nwankwo Kanu set up Thierry Henry for a second and the prolific Marc Overmars scored his eighth in as many games.

However, Nantes refused to lie down and Sibierski and substitute Marama Vahirua struck to earn a creditable draw.

Arsenal are now prepared to give Tony Adams an immediate break from football to prevent a repetition of the long-term absence he has experienced for the past two years.

VILLA LOSE DUBLIN

Aston Villa's top scorer Dion Dublin is likely to be out of action for up to three months after undergoing surgery on a neck injury.

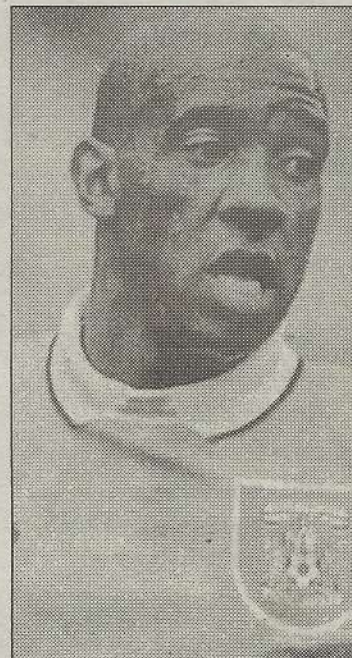
The 30-year-old England striker fractured a vertebrae during Villa's 2-1 win over Sheffield Wednesday in the Premier League game recently.

Dublin suffered the injury in an accidental collision with substitute Gerald Sibon.

The former Coventry City captain has scored 13 goals for Villa this season, including nine in the league, and his injury could not have come at a worse time for under-pressure manager John Gregory.

Villa secretary Steve Stride said: 'It's a massive blow to lose a top player like Dion at this stage of the season.'

'But all our thoughts are centred on him making a complete recovery.'



Dion Dublin: Out for three months.

EUROPEAN PLAYER OF THE YEAR



Rivaldo



THE RESULT

Top 10 standings in the European player of the year poll released by soccer weekly France Football:

1. Rivaldo	(Brazil/Barcelona)	219 points
2. David Beckham	(England/Manchester United)	154
3. Andriy Shevchenko	(Ukraine/Dynamo Kiev and AC Milan)	64
4. Gabriel Batistuta	(Argentina/Fiorentina)	48
5. Luis Figo	(Portugal/Barcelona)	38
6. Roy Keane	(Ireland/Manchester United)	36
7. Christian Vieri	(Italy/Lazio and Inter Milan)	33
8. Sebastian Veron	(Argentina/Parma and Lazio)	30
9. Raul Gonzalez	(Spain/Real Madrid)	27
10. Lothar Matthaeus	(Germany/Bayern Munich)	16

Barcelona's Brazilian forward Rivaldo has been chosen as the European Player of the Year, organisers France Football said last week. Rivaldo, who guided Brazil to the Copa America and Barcelona to the Spanish league title, was the second Brazilian after Ronaldo in 1997 to receive the award.

Manchester United's David Beckham was second. The England midfielder was among the leading favourites after his team won the European Cup, the Premier League, the FA Cup and the Intercontinental Cup titles.

Rivaldo earned 219 points to Beckham's 154.

The Brazilian, who was fifth last year in the same poll, takes over from France's Zinedine Zidane, who had his 1999 season marred by a knee injury.

"I hope I can live up to the expectations of

the voters but everything that has happened this year has made me very proud and happy," Rivaldo said.

"I'm very satisfied with everything I have done with both Barcelona and Brazil.

"However I must pay tribute to my team mates who have been vital in helping me win these honours."

None of the three best-placed players of 1998, Zidane, Ronaldo or Croatian Davor Suker, are featured among the top 10 this year.

Until 1994, the award was open only to European players but since 1995 it has been given to the best player of any nationality playing in a European league.

Rivaldo had already been voted world player of the year by readers of World Soccer magazine.

AC Milan's Andriy Shevchenko of Ukraine was third with 64 points.

RIVALDO DEDICATES AWARD TO LATE FATHER

Long snubbed by Brazilian fans and journalists, Rivaldo says he owes his European player of the year award to his late father — the man he says really believed in him.

"All the merit in my success goes to him," he told France Football in an interview.

"He encouraged me to forge ahead in this way, convinced that I would make it when others doubted me.

"That is why I dedicate this Golden Ball to him," he added.

The second Brazilian to be handed the trophy after Ronaldo two years ago, beating Manchester United and England midfielder David Beckham by 65 points.

"He was my great rival and a great player who would have deserved to win. He proved it by winning four titles with Manchester United," he said.

"But the many goals I scored made the difference. Beckham has won all the major trophies this season and his passing is



Rivaldo : Satisfied

great, but he scores fewer goals than me."

Coveted by most of Europe's wealthiest teams, Rivaldo, who turned down an offer to play for Manchester United in the summer, said he wished to stay with Barcelona until the end of his contract in 2003.

A TRUE NUMBER 10

Following in the footsteps of such Brazilian heroes as Pele and Zico by wearing the revered golden number 10 jersey can prove an intolerable burden but Rivaldo showed he has the necessary pedigree by carrying off the 1999 European Player of the Year award last week.

The Golden Ball award, given by France Football magazine, was almost as much for Rivaldo's part in helping Brazil to lift this year's Copa America as it was for hitting 24 goals in Barcelona's romp to their second successive Spanish league title.

After he demonstrated his

stunning skills in only brief bursts for much of his early career, 1999 was the year when the 27-year-old from Recife finally flourished on a consistent basis.

His efforts for both club and country meant Rivaldo — born Vitor Barbosa Ferreira — became only the second Brazilian to lift the prestigious award after Ronaldo in 1997.

Down the left side of the field Rivaldo is a constant threat to any team, no longer drifting in and out of games, with the speed of a top-class sprinter allied to phenomenal dribbling skills.

FACTFILE

Factfile on Rivaldo, the 1999 European Player of the Year:

1972: Born April 19, Recife, Brazil. Full name Vito Barbosa Ferreira.

1989: Signs professional terms at the age of 16 with Santa Cruz after impressing local scouts in a junior tournament.

1991: Signs for Brazilian first division club Mogi-Mirim.

1993: Signs for Corinthians. Makes international debut in December, scoring only goal in 1-0 victory over Mexico in a friendly international.

1994: Regular international appearances during early part of the year but is not included in Brazil's World Cup-winning squad.

1994: Signs for Palmeiras. Wins Brazilian league championship.

1996: Wins Sao Paulo state championship with Palmeiras.

1996: Plays as an overage member of Brazil's squad at the Atlanta Olympics, winning bronze medal.

1996: Moves to Spain to join Deportivo La Coruna.

1997: Deportivo finish third in the Spanish first division and Rivaldo plays in 41 of their 42 league games, scoring 21 goals. Recalled to Brazilian international side against Wales in November after lengthy absence.

1997: Moves to Barcelona in August for \$26.7 million.

1998: Barcelona win Spanish League and Cup double. Rivaldo scores 19 league goals in 34 games.

1998: Plays in all seven games for Brazil in France '98 as they reach the final before losing 3-0 to the hosts.

1998: Fifth in the European Player of the Year voting, sixth in FIFA Player of the Year poll.

1999: Wins second Spanish league title with Barcelona, scoring 24 goals in 37 games, the second highest tally in the Spanish first division.

1999: Wins Copa America with Brazil but gets sent off twice during the tournament.

1999: Voted European Player of the Year by France Football magazine.



Rivaldo : Phenomenal skills.

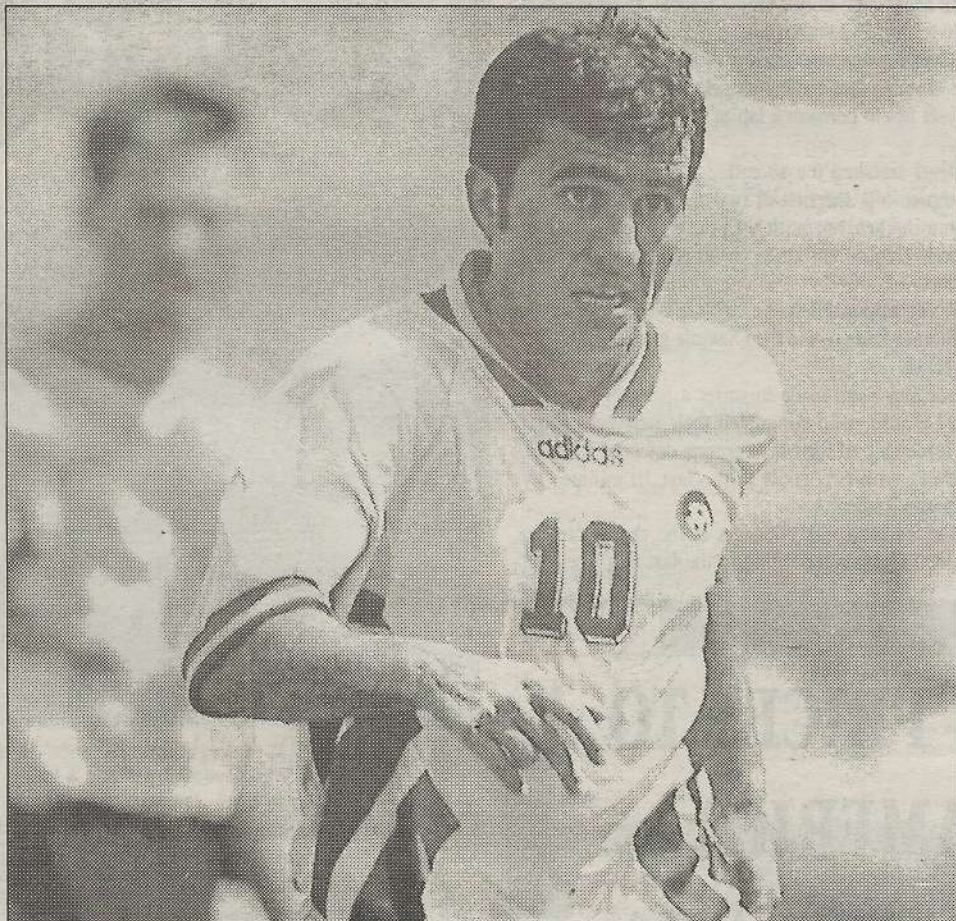
THE HONOUR ROLL

Following are winners of the European player of the year award given by the magazine France Football since 1980:

1980 - Karl-Heinz Rummenigge	(Germany)	Bayern Munich
1981 - Karl-Heinz Rummenigge	(Germany)	Bayern Munich
1982 - Paolo Rossi	(Italy)	Juventus
1983 - Michel Platini	(France)	Juventus
1984 - Michel Platini	(France)	Juventus
1985 - Michel Platini	(France)	Juventus
1986 - Igor Belanov	(Russia)	Dynamo Kiev
1987 - Ruud Gullit	(Netherlands)	AC Milan
1988 - Marco Van Basten	(Netherlands)	AC Milan
1989 - Marco Van Basten	(Netherlands)	AC Milan
1990 - Lothar Matthaus	(Germany)	Inter Milan
1991 - Jean-Pierre Papin	(France)	Olympique Marseille
1992 - Marco Van Basten	(Netherlands)	AC Milan
1993 - Roberto Baggio	(Italy)	Juventus
1994 - Hristo Stoichkov	(Bulgaria)	Barcelona
1995 - George Weah	(Liberia)	AC Milan
1996 - Matthias Sammer	(Germany)	Borussia Dortmund
1997 - Ronaldo	(Brazil)	Internazionale
1998 - Zinedine Zidane	(France)	Juventus
1999 - Rivaldo	(Brazil)	Barcelona

Bill Hurley's Australian SPORTSBOOK

Former team coach Anghel Iordanescu was named the best Romanian coach of the century at the ceremony.



TOP 20 CLUB RANKINGS

Juventus	\$5.00
Arsenal	\$8.00
Roma	\$8.00
Parma	\$7.50
Leeds	\$12.00
Deportivo	\$15.00
Borussia Dortmund	\$15.00
Monaco	\$17.00
Celta Vigo	\$17.00
Atletico Madrid	\$21.00
Real Mallorca	\$21.00
Galatasaray	\$26.00
Udinese	\$26.00
Werder Bremen	\$34.00
Lens	\$41.00
Slavia Prague	\$51.00



RIVER PLATE: CHAMPIONS



River Plate won the Argentine championship last week, a 2-2 draw away to Oscar Ruggeri's San Lorenzo giving them the point they needed to claim the title.

Eighteen-year-old Javier Saviola, the new sensation of Argentine soccer, was again on the scoresheet for River. He converted a 51st minute penalty to finish as the championship's top scorer with 15 goals.



Coach Hernan Diaz: Triumphant.

The game began 15 minutes late as both sets of supporters hurled firecrackers onto the field on another black weekend for Argentine soccer.

The previous day, the match between Belgrano and Independiente had become the third this season to be abandoned due to crowd trouble. Independiente were leading 3-2 at the time.

River's game was played in a tense atmosphere, San Lorenzo fans having already warned River Plate players not to perform a lap of honour in their stadium.

River finished the so-called Apertura (Opening) championship, the first of two championships in the Argentine season, with 44 points, one more than Rosario Central and three ahead of arch-rivals Boca Juniors.

River appeared to be cruising to the title as Guillermo Pereyra and then Saviola gave them a two-goal lead.

But they were made to suffer a nervous finish as San Lorenzo, who completed their first year under the leadership of former Argentina defender Ruggeri, hit back with two goals in the last 10 minutes by Bernardo Romeo.

San Lorenzo, early leaders in the championship, finished fourth after fading in the last few weeks of



River Plate: The players rejoice.

the tournament.

A third San Lorenzo goal would have forced River Plate into a playoff with Rosario Central, who beat Velez Sarsfield with a goal by Maximiliano Cuberas.

Boca, who needed a win and a loss by River to force a playoff, were held to a goalless draw away to Talleres.

Argentina's most fanatically supported club won both championships last season, but were handicapped this year by a serious knee injury to marksman Martin Palermo.

Palermo still finished second in the scorers' table with 14 goals.



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FLAMENGO WIN COPA MERCOSUR

Flamengo won the Copa Mercosur last week, drawing 3-3 away to Palmeiras in a thrilling finale to South America's youngest cup competition.

Substitute Le scored the title winning goal in the 84th minute, less than 10 minutes after coming on in the second leg of the all-Brazilian final.

Flamengo's 4-3 first leg victory meant Palmeiras needed to win to take the tie, decided on results rather than goal aggregate, to a third match.

Palmeiras seemed to be comfortably on their way when a penalty by Francisco Arce gave them a halftime lead which reflected their first-half dominance.

But the visitors stunned the home crowd after the break, turning the game around with goals by Caio and Rodrigo Mendes in a ten-minute spell.

Palmeiras hit back immediately. Within a minute of Mendes' goal, Arce scored again, this time from a free kick, and Paulo Nunes then headed Palmeiras into a 3-2 lead.

Palmeiras coach Luis Felipe Scolari was about to replace striker Faustino Asprilla with a defensive midfielder when Le's goal shattered his plans six minutes from the end.

Le, a 20-year-old who has been given

only a few first team outings since turning professional last year, wept after scoring his goal.

Flamengo won the title, their first in an international competition since 1981, despite selling top striker Romario to rivals Vasco da Gama last month. Romario finished as the Mercosur's topscorer with eight goals.



Palmeiras, who won the inaugural Copa Mercosur last year, were lucky to finish the first half with 11 men.

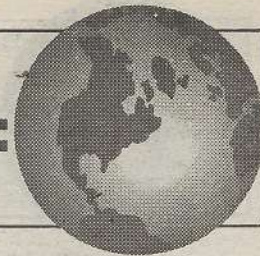
Referee Luciano Almeida and his assistants all missed an incident in which Colombian maverick Asprilla clearly elbowed an opponent in the face.

Former Brazil defender Junior Baiano escaped with a yellow card for a hideous challenge on an opponent, which clearly merited a sending-off.

Palmeiras coach Scolari had berated his players after the first leg for not committing enough fouls.

The Mercosur is a made-for-television event featuring 20 of South America's biggest clubs, who take part by invitation.

Despite the dramatic 13-goal final, much of the tournament was a disappointment with many teams giving it low priority and fielding reserve line-ups.



BEST ADMITTED TO HALL OF FAME

Former Manchester United and Northern Ireland striker George Best is to be inducted into the International Football Hall of Champions during next month's FIFA World Player gala.

Best will join former Brazilian internationals Didi and Zico and ex-Dutch striker Marco van Basten as new members in the group, the only hall of fame recognised by FIFA.

Some 26 leading soccer journalists voted for the new members. The ceremony will take place during a gala in Brussels on January 24.



George Best: Joins a team of elites.

CRUYFF BREAKS ARM

Johan Cruyff broke his arm in the "Orange of the Century" match last week.

No-one at the Dutch Football Association (KNVB) could immediately confirm the report that Cruyff, the organiser of the charity match between Dutch national veterans and a team of foreign players in the Netherlands, had been injured.



Johan Cruyff: Broken limb.

Cruyff, a former Ajax star and Barcelona coach who was elected European footballer of the century in January, stayed until the end of the match. His arm was put in plaster later in the evening.

Proceeds from the match, held at Amsterdam's Arena and broadcast live on television, will go to charity. Some 37,000 people attended.

FIFA TEAM OF THE YEAR

BRAZIL

Brazil have won FIFA's team of the year award for the sixth successive time. The award goes to the team which tops FIFA's rankings in December.

Brazil's Copa America triumph helped them to hold off second-placed Czech Republic who lost just once this year. World champions France were third.

The award will be presented to Brazil at a FIFA gala on January 24 in Brussels.

Rankings (last month in brackets):

1. (1)	Brazil	839 points
2. (3)	Czech Republic	774
3. (2)	France	765
4. (4)	Spain	753
5. (5)	Germany	739
6. (7 equal.)	Argentina	721
7. (7 equal.)	Norway	718
8. (9)	Romania	715
9. (6)	Croatia	713

10. (10)	Mexico	706
11. (14)	Denmark	697
12. (11)	England	695
13. (13)	Yugoslavia	694
14. (12)	Italy	685
15. (15)	Portugal	672
16. (16)	Sweden	663
17. (18)	Paraguay	648
18. (19)	Russia	643
19. (17)	Netherlands	641
20. (23)	Scotland	639
21. (20)	Slovakia	626
22. (21)	U.S.	620
23. (22)	Chile	618
24. (24 equal.)	Morocco	615
25. (24 equal.)	Colombia	614
26 equal. (24 equal.)	Israel	609
26 equal. (28)	Ukraine	609
28. (24 equal.)	Austria	603
29. (33)	Turkey	598
30. (31)	South Africa	597

TV GUIDE

* All times are Australian Eastern Standard Summer Time

Tuesday December 28

Scottish Premier League
Celtic v Rangers (Replay)
Fox Sports
4pm - 6pm

Futbol Mundial
SBS TV
4pm - 4.30pm

National Soccer League
Brisbane v Wollongong (LIVE)
Optus Vision (C7 Sport 12)
8pm - 10pm

Wednesday December 29

English Premier League
Sunderland v Man Utd (LIVE)
Fox Sports
6am - 9.30am

English Premier League
Sunderland v Man Utd (Replay)
Fox Sports
4.30pm - 6.30pm

European Soccer Show
Optus Vision (C7 Sport 12)
10pm - 11pm

Thursday December 30

English Premier League
Chelsea v Sheff Wed (LIVE)
Fox Sports
6am - 9.30am

English Premier League
Chelsea v Sheff Wed (Replay)
Fox Sports
4.30pm - 6.30pm

Italian Serie A: Best of 99
Inter Milan v AC Milan
Optus Vision (ESPN)
7pm - 9pm



Soccer Central
Optus Vision (C7 Sport 12)
9pm - 10pm

Friday December 31

Spanish Soccer
Fox Sports 2
10am - 12pm

German Bundesliga
Munich 1860 v Kaiserslautern
Optus Vision (C7 Sport 13)
3pm - 5pm

Soccer Scene
Fox Sports
5.30pm - 6.30pm

English Premier League
Replay of last weeks games



Fox Sports 2
11.55pm - 6am

Saturday January 1

Soccer Scene (Replay)
Fox Sports
12pm - 1pm

Scottish Premier League
Celtic v Rangers (Replay)
Fox Sports
1pm - 3pm

English Premier League (Replay)
SBS TV
5.30pm - 6.30pm

Sunday January 2

Italian Serie A
SBS TV
10.30am - 11.30am

German Bundesliga
Optus Vision (C7 Sport 13)
9am - 11am

French Premier League
Optus Vision (C7 Sport 13)
4pm - 6pm

National Soccer League
Highlights
ABC TV
5pm - 7pm

National Soccer League
Wollongong v Parramatta (LIVE)
Optus Vision (C7 Sport 12)
6.30pm - 8.30pm

Monday January 3

Best Of English Soccer
Optus Vision (C7 Sport 12)
4.30pm - 5.30pm

National Soccer League
Auckland v Canberra (LIVE)



Optus Vision (C7 Sport 12)
5.30pm - 7.30pm

English Premier League
SBS TV
7.30pm - 8.30pm



SHEVCHENKO FULFILS DREAM



Andriy Shevchenko: Lifelong Milan dream.

Andriy Shevchenko is not spinning a cliched public relations line when he talks of his dream move to AC Milan.

He may have been born in Kiev, in the former Soviet Union, the son of a Red Army officer, but since his schooldays his sights have been set on the San Siro stadium - home to Italian champions AC Milan.

"When I was 14 years old I went to Milan for the first time to play in a youth tournament with Dynamo Kiev," Shevchenko said in an interview last week.

"We were playing outside the city but we made a trip to see the San Siro. From the moment I walked inside that ground I had the ambition to play for Milan, so you can imagine how I felt when I was first offered the chance to sign for the club."

With 17 goals in 26 Champions League games for Dynamo-Kiev, including superb performances and strikes against Barcelona and Bayern Munich, Shevchenko became the hottest property in European football, although his shy manner and the refusal of Dynamo to auction him kept hype to a minimum.

But despite his record and reputation AC Milan took their time before forking out \$25 million for the 23-year-old's signature on a five-year contract this

summer.

"For two years someone from Milan was watching me in almost every game in the Champions League and I knew they were there," Shevchenko says.

Milan's caution may have been based on the concern of some over whether a young man from Kiev would be able to cope with criticism, scrutiny and pressures of life in the world's top league.

Those doubts had their foundation in the failure of many players from the former Soviet Union to settle with western clubs.

Some of the leading lights of the great Dynamo Kiev sides of the eighties such as Oleg Kuznetsov, Igor Belanov and Alexei Mikhailichenko failed to live up to expectations when they left home.

But Shevchenko has proved his doubters wrong. With eight goals in 12 games the pacy little frontman is currently the second top scorer in Serie A and he is visibly growing in confidence with each game.

The view that East European players struggle in the west is now out of date, he says.

"What you have to remember is that in the past the door of the USSR was closed. Ten years ago footballers could only leave when they were over the age of 28 and perhaps not at their best - that is no longer the case."

He then reels off a list of Ukrainian players he says are capable of achieving success in the west, including his old Dynamo strike partner Serhiy Rebrov.

When Shevchenko made his first appearance in the red and black shirt, for a low-key friendly against third division Varese in August, he played with as much energy and determination as he had shown in those Champions League games for Dynamo.

Behind the scenes team mates and Milan coach Alberto Zaccheroni tried to calm him down. "He is trying too hard, he wants to prove himself in every game," said Zaccheroni after one pre-season game.

But there have been few complaints since the real matches began and the player retains a youthful enthusiasm rare in today's game.

"I am enjoying myself. In Italy there are the best players in the world, the best coaches and it is very difficult. But this is what I wanted. In some countries there are only a few really big matches in a season, the traditional derbies, but here the important games seem to come one after the other."

He may be upbeat about life in Serie A, but he says this season has also brought two bitter disappointments.

Milan finished bottom of their group in the first phase of the Champions League, meaning an early exit from European competition.

Then Ukraine were surprisingly beaten to a place in the finals of Euro 2000, as they lost out in a play-off with Slovenia, a result which he says he has still to come to terms with.

"All the time I am thinking about Ukraine missing out. It was very difficult for me coming so soon after Milan went out of the Champions League, but we still have a lot to play for in the Italian league, it is a long season."

Now that the doubts have turned to accolades, the only concerns over Shevchenko's future are now

whether he can keep a level head.

One guarantee that the youngster doesn't get carried away with the praise heaped on him by the Italian press is his coach Zaccheroni.

"He still has to work a lot, he must change a lot of things," says Zaccheroni who believes he has yet to fully adjust to a different style of play.

"It is not easy for anyone to change the way they play. At Dynamo he was free to do what he wanted on the field, here it is different."



Andriy Shevchenko: Enjoying himself.

If Zaccheroni is right and Shevchenko is still adjusting, Serie A defences will be wondering what to expect when he finally settles in.



DUNGA TO COACH IN JAPAN

Brazilian World Cup-winning captain Carlos Dunga could take his first step into soccer management as coach of Japanese and Asian champions Jubilo Iwata.

Current coach Takashi Kuwahara has said he intends to stand down after one of the most successful seasons ever by a Japanese club. Jubilo lifted the J.League title,

the Asian Club Championship and the Asian Super Cup.

Dunga, who played for Jubilo for three seasons, has emerged as one of the favourites to replace him.

Kuwahara, 51, was named the Coach of the Year in May by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) but says he will seriously consider quitting after the Emperor's Cup, Japan's



Carlos Dunga: Next stop - Japan.

annual knock-out tournament which ends on January 1.

Dunga, who won the 1997 J.League title with the club, spent the weekend with Jubilo club officials while on his way to Macau to play in a match commemorating the former Portuguese colony's return to Chinese rule.

Jubilo president Tadanori Arata was quoted in the December edition of Asian football magazine AFC News as saying he would like to see the former Stuttgart

and Fiorentina midfielder return to the club.

"We still have a great relationship with him and hope that some day... (he) will come back and coach," Arata said.

"Dunga is going to Italy to get his coaching licence... and hopefully he will come back and be for us what Zico has been for Kashima Antlers."

Zico became general manager at Kashima, who won the league title in 1996 and 1998, after joining the club in the early days of the J.League as a player.

CANTONA THE GREATEST - BECKHAM

David Beckham has listed Frenchman Eric Cantona ahead of his Manchester United team mates as the best he has ever played with.



David Beckham: Cantona is the best

"Eric brought everything to this club," the England midfielder said in an interview.

"He was the best player I ever played with. He improved everyone's game here," he added of the Frenchman, who joined United in 1992 and retired in 1997.

The mercurial Cantona won the league title with United in 1992-93 and the double in 1994 as the team set off on a period of prolonged domination in English soccer.

In the interview, Beckham also revealed that he thought his Old Trafford career had stalled in 1995 when manager Alex Ferguson loaned him to lowly Preston North End.

Beckham, one of three men shortlisted for this year's world footballer of the year award, had joined United as a trainee in 1993 but had still not made his first-team debut when he was farmed out.

"To me, going on loan was edging you out of the frame for United's future," he said. "In my eyes, that is what Alex was doing. But in the end, it turned out to be a good experience."

Team mate Gary Neville said people had thought Beckham was a "bit soft going into tackles and headers" and the five-match stint at the third division club toughened him up.

Beckham also said he and his United team mates thought their European Cup hopes were gone when Bayern Munich led them 1-0 in the last seconds of this year's final.

"We all thought it was all over," he said. "But we are a team known for battling right to the end and that is what we did." United won 2-1 with two late goals and secured an unprecedented treble of league, FA and European Cup wins.



Eric Cantona: Brought everything to the club.

GRAHAM APOLOGISES

George Graham apologised to fans after Newcastle United dealt him his worst defeat as Tottenham Hotspur manager with a 6-1 win in their FA Cup third-round replay.

But Graham, who called the match a "comedy of errors", insisted that his English Premier League side could still qualify for Europe next season with a top-six finish.

"I take my share of the responsibility," the former Arsenal and Leeds United boss said. "I feel particularly sorry for the fans who travelled to St James' Park."

The defeat was Tottenham's worst in the FA Cup, a competition they have won eight times, since March 1928 when they lost 6-1 to Huddersfield in the sixth round.

"I was disappointed, not just by the result but the manner of our defeat," Graham added.

"Individually too many of my players were, putting it politely, below par. It hurts to lose like that but former club.

the important thing now is that I put it right.

"We have two games to play before we reach the halfway stage of the season and we're seventh in the table.

"Once we get the injured players back in the side there's no reason why we can't finish in the top six and qualify for Europe again," added Graham.

The London club qualified for Europe this season as winners of the League Cup.

But they have now been knocked out of three cup competitions, losing 3-1 to first division Fulham in the League Cup fourth round and 2-1 on aggregate to Germany's Kaiserslautern in the second round of the UEFA Cup.

French winger David Ginola, who scored Tottenham's goal, was criticised in some newspapers.

Ginola was substituted 15 minutes from time after being booed and taunted mercilessly throughout the game by supporters of his



George Graham: "We can still make Europe."

FA CUP FOURTH ROUND DRAW

Revised draw for the fourth round of the English F.A. Cup after Wednesday's matches:

SATURDAY, JANUARY 8:

Grimsby	v	Bolton
Aston Villa	v	Southampton
Plymouth	v	Preston
Walsall or Gillingham	v	Bradford City
Fulham	v	Wimbledon
Chelsea	v	Nottingham Forest or Oxford United
Tranmere	v	Sunderland

Arsenal	v	Leicester City
Newcastle United	v	Sheffield United
Wrexham	v	Cambridge United
Coventry City	v	Burnley
Sheffield Wednesday	v	Wolverhampton
Charlton	v	Queens Park Rangers
Everton	v	Birmingham

SUNDAY, JANUARY 9:

Manchester City	v	Leeds United
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MONDAY, JANUARY 10:

Liverpool	v	Blackburn
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CHELSEA SIGN BRAZILIAN

Chelsea have signed Brazilian defender Emerson Thome from Sheffield Wednesday, the club with the worst defensive record in the premier league, for 2.7 million pounds (\$4.34 million).

Champions League hopefuls Chelsea, currently 10th in the league but with one of the best defensive records, said on Thursday that Thome had signed a four-and-a-half-year contract.

"I'm very glad, it's a wonderful move for me to sign for a big club like Chelsea," said the Brazilian, a crowd favourite

who was known as "The Wall" at Wednesday because of his physique.

Chelsea needed defensive reinforcements because French international

Marcel Desailly and Denmark's Jes Høgh are both expected to be out until the middle of next month due to injuries sustained at the weekend.

French international Franck Leboeuf is also likely to be suspended for several matches after being sent off against Leeds. The defender was seen stamping on Australian Harry Kewell and will have to miss at least the next two games.

Thome, 27, joined Wednesday on a free transfer from Benfica in March 1998 and formed a strong partnership there with the veteran former England international Des Walker.

Wednesday are currently bottom of the premier league, five points adrift of nearest club Watford.



NATIONAL LEAGUE

	Total							Home							Away						
	P	W	D	L	F	A	PTS	P	W	D	L	F	A		P	W	D	L	F	A	
SYDNEY OLYMPIC	12	8	2	2	21	9	26	6	3	2	1	10	6		6	5	0	1	11	3	
CARLTON	12	7	3	2	26	13	24	6	4	1	1	14	7		6	3	2	1	12	6	
WOLLONGONG WOLVES	13	6	4	3	24	18	22	6	4	0	2	11	7		7	2	4	1	13	11	
PERTH GLORY	12	6	3	3	26	16	21	6	3	2	1	17	9		6	3	1	2	9	7	
BRISBANE STRIKERS	12	6	3	3	18	12	21	6	3	2	1	13	7		6	3	1	2	5	5	
MARCONI STALLIONS	12	6	2	4	16	17	20	5	3	0	2	4	7		7	3	2	2	12	10	
NEWCASTLE BREAKERS	12	5	4	3	18	17	19	6	2	3	1	11	10		6	3	1	2	7	7	
AUCKLAND KINGZ	12	4	4	4	22	23	16	6	1	3	2	10	14		6	3	1	2	12	9	
PARRAMATTA POWER	12	4	3	5	19	20	15	7	2	3	2	10	9		5	2	0	3	9	11	
SOUTH MELBOURNE	13	4	3	6	20	21	15	7	4	2	1	16	7		6	0	1	5	4	14	
GIPPSLAND FALCONS	12	3	4	5	8	13	13	6	2	1	3	4	5		6	1	3	2	4	8	
MELBOURNE KNIGHTS	12	4	1	7	14	23	13	6	3	0	3	6	6		6	1	1	4	8	17	
NORTHERN SPIRIT	12	4	1	7	9	18	13	5	2	0	3	4	8		7	2	1	4	5	10	
CANBERRA COSMOS	12	3	2	7	15	22	11	7	2	1	4	9	8		5	1	1	3	6	14	
ADELAIDE CITY FORCE	12	2	4	6	11	16	10	5	1	2	2	6	7		7	1	2	4	5	9	
SYDNEY UNITED	12	2	3	7	8	17	9	7	2	1	4	5	8		5	0	2	3	3	9	

Sydney United v South Melbourne Head to Head

Sydney United	16
South Melbourne	12
Draws	5

Sydney United need a win badly as at the moment the Herculean effort extends only to the fact that they prop up 15 other teams on the ladder. South will have their mind firmly set on the Copacabana and an adventure never before undertaken.

Both teams can't afford to drop points

TIP: A likely draw

Perth Glory v Marconi Stallions Head to Head

Perth Glory	4
Marconi	0
Draws	3

With the Glory losing touch with the leading pack last week after their 3-2 loss to the Breakers they'll be itching for maximum points at home.

Marconi were fortunate enough last week to come away with full points on the toughest road trip in the competition at Gippsland.

TIP: Glory back to winning ways

Melbourne Knights v Gippsland Head to Head

Melbourne Knights	8
Gippsland	5
Draws	2

The Knights were unlucky not to beat the Kingz in Auckland last week and have an excellent record under new coach Vlado Vanis. Gippsland have a lot to prove, especially since the new NSL criteria was announced. Both teams are sitting on 13 points and a win would be an ideal boost for both.

TIP: The Knights to run away with the game.

Brisbane Strikers v Wollongong Head to Head

Brisbane Strikers	10
Wollongong Wolves	4
Draws	3

The Strikers will be hungry after finding a hitch in their armour over the last few weeks. After a tough match last week against Sydney Olympic they will be primed for maximum points.

Wollongong have had four past wins against Brisbane, but significantly only once before in Brisbane.

TIP: Brisbane to strike form again

Canberra Cosmos v Northern Spirit Head to Head

Canberra Cosmos	1
Northern Spirit	1
Draws	0

These two sides have only ever met twice and completely share the spoils.

The Spirit have been the season's disappointment so far winning only four out of 12.

The Cosmos, for a change, are off the bottom of the table.

TIP: Their first ever draw

Parramatta Power v Sydney Olympic Head to Head

First Meeting between the sides

The creation of a new local derby should be poised to be an electric match. Both teams are coming off quite significant victories last week and will be looking to keep up the pace.

The Power haven't quite been the team most thought they would be, but it's a long season and don't write them off just yet.

Olympic have lost only twice all year and maintain a two-point lead at the top of the table. They are the form side of the competition.

TIP: Power causes the upset

Carlton SC v Newcastle Breakers Head to Head

Carlton SC	2
Newcastle Breakers	1
Draws	1

A real tough match to call. Carlton have been the quiet achievers all year and lie comfortably second on the table.

Newcastle, together with Sydney Olympic are the form side of the NSL. Four wins on the trot. They have broken all sorts of club records in the last few weeks.

TIP: Carlton miss the opportunity to go top. A draw

Adelaide City Force v Auckland Kingz Head to Head

Adelaide City Force	0
Auckland Kingz	1
Draws	0

Adelaide and Zoran Matic might just be about to begin one of their now famous meteoric rises up the table. Mori seems back to his best and the recent hard work for the young Adelaide side might start to be paying off.

Auckland don't travel well and were very lucky at home last week. Their minds will be on getting home for new year's.

TIP: May the Force be with you. A whitewash.

LEADING GOALSCORERS

P Foster	(Brisbane Strikers)	9
A Moreira	(Carlton SC)	9
M Curcija	(Sth Melbourne)	8
J Buonavoglia	(Newcastle Breakers)	7
S Petrovski	(Wollongong Wolves)	7
C Boutsianis	(Perth Glory)	6
P Cardozo	(Sydney Olympic)	6
B Despotovski	(Perth Glory)	6

ABSW PLAYER OF THE YEAR

(PROGRESSIVE POINTS)

A Harper	(Newcastle)	15
A Crews	(Parramatta)	14
P Cardozo	(Olympic)	13
M Curcija	(South Melb)	12
D. Cervinski	(Wollongong)	12
M Durakovic	(Gippsland)	11
A Costanzo	(Adelaide)	10
J Buonavoglia	(Newcastle)	10

ROUND FOURTEEN

Sunday 2 January: Newcastle Breakers v Sydney United Breakers Stadium 6pm.
Sydney Olympic v Perth Glory Belmore Sports Ground 6.30pm, Wollongong Wolves v Parramatta Power Brandon park 6.30pm,
Northern Spirit v Brisbane Strikers North Sydney Oval 7.30pm, Gippsland Falcons v Adelaide City Force Falcons Stadium 7pm, Marconi Stallions v Melbourne Knights Marconi Stadium 6pm, Auckland Kingz v Canberra Cosmos North Harbour Stadium 7.30pm.

(all times provided are local times)

NOTE: South Melbourne v Carlton SC match deferred until March 1, 2000